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ELLIOTT MONOGRAPHS

ON THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

Edited by

EDWARD C. ARMSTRONG

9

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THE ABBÉ PRÉVOST

AND

ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

GEORGE R. HAVENS



PRINCETON, N. J.

PARIS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

LIBRAIRIE ÉDOUARD CHAMPION

1921



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MACON, PROTAT FRÈRES, IMPRIMEURS.

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## INTRODUCTION

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It was the French Protestant refugees, driven from their homes by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, who for the first thirty years of the eighteenth century played the leading rôle in spreading on the Continent a knowledge of English institutions, science, and literature. They were not authors of the first rank, nor even of the second. They were industrious translators and compilers who through the columns of various literary journals prepared the public for the work of three men of greater talents, two of them men of genius, Bèat de Muralt, Voltaire, and the Abbé Prévost<sup>1</sup>. With the coming of these three men it is at last evident that France has turned her face for the first time toward the north. M<sup>me</sup> de Staël is the remote, but none the less the direct, result of the literary atmosphere which was being formed thus early in the eighteenth century. Muralt's *Lettres sur les Anglois et sur les François* are of 1725, though written about 1694 or 1695. They show observation and insight, and were much read<sup>2</sup>, but they gave little space to literature. In fact, toward such matters their tone was distinctly apologetic. Voltaire's contribution consists of the *Discours sur la tragédie* prefixed to *Brutus* and printed in 1731; of the French version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, an advance defense of the *Henriade* published in 1733; and, most important of all, from the standpoint of their wide influence, of the *Lettres philosophiques* which appeared in 1734. All these we shall further

1. Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire*. Paris, 1895, p. 42.

2. They influenced Voltaire and also Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*.

on have occasion to discuss in some detail<sup>1</sup>. Finally came the Abbé Prévost, whom it is customary to consider as the most fully anglicized of all French authors of the period<sup>2</sup>, and as a sort of literary heretic<sup>3</sup> who alone gave himself up to unreserved admiration — often unreasonable admiration — of Shakespear and of English literature in general. Before the publication of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, the Abbé Prévost had already published in 1731 Volumes V to VII of his *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, and in 1733 had begun to issue the *Pour et Contre*. The earlier work contains a few remarks on English literature<sup>4</sup>, in the main very favorable in character. The second, the *Pour et Contre*, was a weekly periodical which appeared on Mondays from 1733 to 1740. It treated a great variety of subjects of most unequal value and interest, but its chief aim was the publication of literary news and criticism written by the editor.

In view of the important position which Prévost holds in the movement of ideas at this time from England to France, and thence over all parts of Europe to which French culture had extended<sup>5</sup>, it seems of special interest to examine his criticism in so far as it deals with English literature, and to determine to how great a degree the conventional estimates of it should, after closer scrutiny, be accepted. Such a study will permit us also to see in formation, as it were, the future celebrated translator of Richardson. The present monograph

1. Boissy's one-act comedy, *Le François à Londres*, is of this period (first played July 19, 1727), but it makes no reference to English literature.

2. Texte, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

3. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*. Paris, 1898, p. 173. Cf., for similar judgements, V. Schröder, *L'abbé Prévost*, 1898, p. 44; F. Baldensperger, "Esquisse d'une histoire littéraire de Shakespeare en France," *Études d'Histoire littéraire*, 2<sup>e</sup> série. Paris, 1910, pp. 159-60. M. Schröder has somewhat modified his opinion in an article entitled "L'abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du dix-huitième siècle*, 1914, pp. 136-37.

4. *Œuvres de Prévost*. Paris, 1810-16, Vol. II, pp. 280-82.

5. The *Pour et Contre* was read in Russia. See André Lirondelle, *Shakespeare en Russie*. Paris, 1912, p. 16.

is designed to be not merely a commentary upon certain articles of literary criticism which formed part of the secondary activity of the author of *Manon Lescaut*, but also an added chapter in the history of literary relations between France and England during the period up to 1740, when Prévost ceased to publish the *Pour et Contre*. However imperfectly this wider aim may be realized, questions of pure fact I have tried to examine with sufficient care to ensure correctness, though I dare not feel confident that I have completely escaped the pitfalls which lie ever in wait. I can only hope to be nearer the minimum than the maximum of error.

Prévost's spelling and punctuation have not been modernized. In certain cases, citations have been given in full which to some readers may seem unduly long. The *Pour et Contre* is not, however, readily accessible, and it seemed, on the whole, wise to give the more important passages in Prévost's own words rather than to leave the reader to trust to my own *résumés* of the author's thought.

In conclusion, I desire to acknowledge my special obligation to Monsieur E. Carcassonne, whose suggestion led to my undertaking this study, and who during its progress made many valuable criticisms and suggestions, and to Professor E. C. Armstrong for permitting me to draw largely upon his experience and judgment in its treatment. I am glad also to renew my thanks to the Library of Princeton University, which generously placed at my disposal its edition of the not easily obtainable *Pour et Contre*, and thus made possible this study of what the Abbé Prévost thought and wrote about English literature.

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## CHAPTER I

### PRÉVOST IN ENGLAND

The relatively little that is known of the life of the Abbé Prévost is due almost entirely to the careful, painstaking study of Henry Harrisse. How indispensable is his work, becomes clear as soon as one reads any study of Prévost prepared without that aid, as for instance M. Anatole France's essay in *le Génie latin*<sup>1</sup>. It seems that, unless the future brings the improbable good fortune of the discovery of new documents, Harrisse has done all that can be done to reconstitute the troubled life of the Abbé. It is unfortunate that of the most important epoch of his whole eventful career, his sojourn in England, we know almost nothing in detail. For this study particularly, it is desirable to gather together the little we do know of that period, the more since Harrisse, though furnishing the documents, has not woven them into a detailed and connected narrative. M. Schrøder has performed well that task, but not quite from the same point of view as that which interests us here.

What had been the chief events of Prévost's life before this important period? Student, twice soldier<sup>2</sup>, novice, teacher, priest<sup>3</sup>, he had given proof of great uncertainty, not to say fickleness, as to his vocation, and of a disposition "vif et sensible au plaisir"<sup>4</sup>. He had been in Holland in 1719<sup>5</sup>, and then, as later, unpleasant stories, most improbable in their exaggeration, had been circulated about him. Dom Dupuis,

1. Anatole France, "les Aventures de l'Abbé Prévost," *le Génie latin*, pp. 179-206.

2. H. Harrisse, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 95-96.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 103-04, 113-14.

4. *Pour et Contre*, IV, p. 38.

5. Harrisse, pp. 96-97.



however, a biographer whom HARRISSE considers in general as worthy of confidence, alludes to these stories without committing himself beyond implying that Prévost, according to accepted standards, had in no way dishonored himself, and for the rest gives a very favorable, but by no means improbable, picture. "L'heureuse physionomie dont la nature l'avait favorisé, la douceur de son caractère, les progrès qu'il avait déjà faits dans les belles-lettres, lui ouvrirent la porte des meilleures maisons. Il s'y distingua même par plusieurs productions d'esprit, soit en vers, soit en prose<sup>1</sup>." Whatever Manons he may have encountered on his way, we know that he returned to France not later than early in November, 1720<sup>2</sup>, very much overwhelmed by a love affair, in one way or another unfortunate. Replying in the *Pour et Contre* to the stories of Gordon de Perceval (Lenglet-Dufresnoy), Prévost says with his customary candor: "Je laisse à juger quels devoient être depuis l'âge de vingt jusqu'à vingt-cinq ans, le cœur et les sentimens d'un homme qui a composé le Cléveland à trente-cinq ou trente-six. La malheureuse fin d'un engagement trop tendre me conduisit enfin au *Tombeau*; c'est le nom que je donne à l'Ordre respectable où j'allai m'ensevelir, et où je demeurai quelque tems si bien mort, que mes parens et mes amis ignorèrent ce que j'étois devenu<sup>3</sup>." This is at any rate the tone of frankness and explains, if it does not excuse, the unfortunate issue of the vows taken before the Benedictines of Saint-Maur the ninth of November, 1721, "avec," as he innocently wrote ten years later, "toutes les restrictions intérieures qui pouvoient m'autoriser à les rompre<sup>4</sup>."

At Saint-Maur, at Saint-Ouen, at Notre-Dame-du-Bec, at the Abbey of Fécamp, at Saint-Germer, at Evreux, at Séz, at the monastery of the Blancs-Manteaux in Paris, Prévost found the next six years certainly full of changes. Finally, late in

1. Cited by HARRISSE, pp. 96-97.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

3. PC., IV, 38-39.

4. Letter from The Hague, Nov. 10, 1731, cited by HARRISSE, p. 163.

1727 or about the beginning of 1728<sup>1</sup>, he entered the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés<sup>2</sup>, bringing with him probably, since the approbation was accorded the fifth of April, 1728<sup>3</sup>, the first two volumes of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, composed in that case at the Blancs-Manteaux or at Evreux<sup>4</sup>. The licence to print was granted the sixteenth of April<sup>5</sup>.

At Saint-Germain Prévost was not happy. He was put to work at the *Gallia Christiana* and, though Harrissee has modified his earlier opinion that his work was limited to copying notes, correcting proofs, and translating into Latin what older collaborators had already written in French<sup>6</sup>, yet it is not likely that the task was gay. The story that he wrote alone almost one whole volume of the *Gallia* is, as Harrissee observes, entirely improbable<sup>7</sup>. In any event, whatever the character of the work, it was wholly unsuited to his ardent imagination, already filled with the novel he had in part composed and was evidently continuing, since the third and fourth volumes were approved the nineteenth of November following<sup>8</sup>. The very composition of these novels<sup>9</sup> recalled perforce all the memories of his wanderings and his loves, and made him long to return to the freer, undisciplined life outside. Then too his relations with the other members of the order were not agreeable. It is only necessary to read the satirical sketches traced of them, not bitterly but none the less with keenness and precision, in the third volume of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*<sup>10</sup>, to see how little these men were fitted to be con-

1. Harrissee, pp. 116-17.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Op. cit.*, p. 125.

4. *Loc. cit.*

5. *Loc. cit.*

6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 117-19. For the corrected opinion, see Harrissee, *la Vie monastique de l'abbé Prévost*, pp. 29-30.

7. Harrissee, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 117-19.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

9. The *Mémoires* are rather a series of separate narratives than a connected whole.

10. Cited by Harrissee, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 120-24.



genial companions for him. Not that it is necessary to attach great weight to Prévost's complaints in his letter of the eighteenth of October, 1728, to Dom Thibaut, General Superior of the congregation of Saint-Maur at Saint-Germain-des-Prés<sup>1</sup>. "J'ai eu chez vous," he says, "de justes sujets de chagrin... Par quel malheur est-il donc arrivé qu'on n'a jamais cessé de me regarder avec défiance dans la congrégation, qu'on m'a soupçonné plus d'une fois des trahisons les plus noires, et qu'on m'en a toujours cru capable, lors même que l'évidence n'a pas permis qu'on m'en accusât<sup>2</sup>?" Doubtless, between average, matter-of-fact men like the other members of the congregation and an ardent, mercurial, free spirit like Prévost's there had been many misunderstandings, perhaps even meannesses on the one side, and strong provocation on the other. Between the ordinary man, usually deeply occupied with what are called the practical affairs of life, and the genius, more often than not extremely careless of those same practicalities, an *entente cordiale* is rarely possible. Prévost of course ought never to have been in the order. And then too, without doubting in the least that he wrote his letter in good faith, I do not see what in his past life could have justified his fellow members in granting him complete confidence, and perhaps they were not altogether wrong in suspecting a brother who by his own later admission entered the order only with a mental reservation which he considered a justification for his leaving it as soon as he thought wise. One remembers also how the characters of *Cléveland*, if often they were trustful to a degree bordering on simple-mindedness, at other times were no less foolishly suspicious without cause. Perhaps Prévost, in this also a forerunner of Rousseau, imagined ills which did not exist, or rather, which existed in less degree by far. However that may be, he decided to leave Saint-Germain-des-Prés and to pass into a milder branch of the order of Saint Benedict, where he could leave the

1. *Op. cit.*, pp. 138-39.

2. Cited by HARRISSE, pp. 134 ff.

*Gallia* behind him and choose "un genre d'étude plus conforme à son génie," as Dom Dupuis tells us<sup>1</sup>.

Willing to comply with the forms, Prévost applied to the Pope and obtained a Brief of Translation, which Mgr. Sabbathier, the Bishop of Amiens, was to "fulminate." In his *Pour et Contre* Prévost gives interesting information as to his mental state at this time. "Le sentiment me revint, et je reconnus que ce cœur si vif étoit encore brûlant sous la cendre. La perte de ma liberté m'affligea jusqu'aux larmes. Il étoit trop tard. Je cherchai ma consolation pendant cinq ou six ans dans les charmes de l'étude. Mes livres étoient mes amis fidèles; mais ils étoient morts comme moi. Enfin, je pris occasion d'un petit mécontentement, et je me retirai<sup>2</sup>." Here, it seems, is the real reason for his departure, the lack of a true vocation, not an actual grievance of any seriousness. Thus, in 1734, after his feelings have had time to cool, he is much nearer the truth than in his letter to Dom Thibaut, and says that he merely used the "petit mécontentement" as a pretext to satisfy what had long been his desire<sup>3</sup>.

But, his Brief of Translation granted, Prévost was guilty of an indiscretion due to his burning impatience to have done once and for all with Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He left without waiting for the "fulmination," which he had every reason to think would take place at once, but which was delayed owing to a real or pretended suspicion of the sincerity of his intentions. Efforts were made to induce him to return peaceably, but Prévost, once free, had no desire to give up his

1. Cited by HARRISSE, p. 132.

2. PC., IV, 39.

3. He goes on to say in the rest of the passage: "Quoique l'amour de la liberté m'ait fait quitter la France, la Flèche et Saint-Germain, où j'ai fait mon séjour, sont des noms chers à ma mémoire. La conduite que j'y ai tenue, ne me laisse à craindre aucun reproche, et les bontés qu'on y a eues pour moi excitent encore ma plus vive reconnaissance." PC., IV, 39-40. Otherwise a very significant passage, its value is much lessened by the fact that it is written at London when Prévost was no doubt willing to placate the authorities and obtain freedom to return in peace to France.



newly recovered liberty. As a result the fathers notified the police and demanded his arrest, complaining that "il se promène impunément tous les jours dans Paris<sup>1</sup>." Prévost did not continue his walks in Paris. Remembering no doubt the precedent set by the Protestant refugees ever since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes forty years before, remembering also Voltaire's departure only a little more than two years previously<sup>2</sup>, he set his face toward England. On the sixth of November, 1728, a *lettre de cachet* was issued against him. His departure took place soon after he received news of the government's action<sup>3</sup>.

The position of England as the refuge for the oppressed and as the seeming realization of all the fond dreams of political and religious liberty cherished by the eighteenth century is too well known to be insisted upon. M. Schrøder has developed this in connection with Prévost<sup>4</sup>, but perhaps with somewhat too much emphasis upon his unquestioning enthusiasm for things English and his delight in the free presentation of unorthodox views of religion. "Mais ce qui l'étonna et le charma, je crois, plus que tout le reste," says M. Schrøder, "ce fut la libre discussion des doctrines religieuses. Certes, lui, le moine défroqué, le bénédictin en rupture de ban, il a dû lire avec passion le *Discours sur la liberté de pensée* que Collins avait publié une vingtaine d'années auparavant (1713), et le *Christianisme sans mystère* de Toland, qui, paru à la fin du dix-septième siècle, avait été condamné au feu par le parlement de Dublin<sup>5</sup>." This matter of Prévost's religious attitude well merits a separate study, without which it would be rash to express too definite an

1. HARRISSE, p. 440.

2. Voltaire arrived in England probably the thirtieth of May, 1726. See J. Churton Collins, *Voltaire, Montesquieu et Rousseau en Angleterre*, 1911, p. 7. M. Foulet sets the date as late as August 15, 1726. *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France*, 1906, p. 19.

3. HARRISSE, pp. 141-42.

4. *L'abbé Prévost*, Chap. II.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

opinion. However, attention may be called to the fact that whenever the Abbé mentions the deists in the *Pour et Contre*, it is to comment upon them unfavorably. "Ne parlons que du célèbre Toland. Que d'erreurs et d'absurdités ne trouve-t-on pas dans les œuvres d'un homme qui s'est fait un si grand nom parmi les Anglois? Et s'il a eu pendant sa vie le bonheur d'imposer jusques dans ses livres, quelle impression ne devoit-il pas faire dans les conversations particulières?<sup>1</sup> " This was in the last volume; already in the first he had spoken of "toutes les impiétez et les rêveries antichrétiennes des Tolands, des Collins, des Woolstons, des Tyndales, etc."<sup>2</sup> Other passages in the same tone might be cited<sup>3</sup>. They seem the sincere expression of a man who might indeed have found the confinement of the monastery insupportable, who might have had his moments of large tolerance<sup>4</sup>, but who was none the less firmly set against the deistic movement in general, which he thought to be simply a deliberately malicious attempt to undermine religious orthodoxy. It is true that there is the ever present possibility that this attitude may have been dictated by prudential reasons, but the burden of proof is on him who would read into the text the opposite of what it says. *Cléland* shows unquestionable traces of deistic influence, even though Prévost announced in the preface his anti-deistic aim. If, however, the hero's conversion seems to-day far from convincing, no doubt it appeared quite otherwise to its author and to many of his readers. M. Anatole France is probably correct in calling Prévost "le moins philosophe des hommes"<sup>5</sup>,

1. PC., XX, 340-41.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 227.

3. On Tyndal, cf. PC., I, 265; III, 348-49; IV, 66-67; on Collins, see PC., XII, 314; on Woolston, PC., I, 49-58; on Chubb, PC., XVI, 13-14.

4. See *Cléland*, Book IV (*Œuvres*, V, pp. 164 ff.) on the natural religion Cléland teaches the Abaquis.

5. *Le Génie latin*, p. 189. For a similar opinion see Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits littéraires*, I, pp. 273-74. Cf. MHQ., II, 303, on the death of Saint-Evremond. "C'est ainsi que les plus grands hommes s'aveuglent malheureusement dans l'affaire la plus importante..., je veux dire l'intérêt éternel de leur âme." Probably, though not certainly, Prévost



taking "philosophe" in the eighteenth-century sense. To his mention of Prévost's belief in miracles and prophetic dreams, M. France might well have added his naïve confidence in the "paquets du Sieur Arnould" as an infallible means, not simply of curing, but of warding off in advance, attacks of apoplexy, and his evident pleasure in returning to the subject and in defending it against attacks<sup>1</sup>. Prévost's was a spirit to which religion would appeal much as it did to Rousseau's, and it was hardly probable that rationalistic attacks would have a considerable effect upon his beliefs, though doubtless they would still further encourage his natural tendency toward toleration. To be dogmatic was foreign to his character. In the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*<sup>2</sup>, after speaking of the political liberty which the English enjoy, he continues: "La religion n'y est pas moins libre. Les Anglois ont reconnu que la contrainte est un attentat contre l'esprit de l'évangile. Ils savent que le cœur des hommes est le domaine de Dieu; que la violence ne produit que des changements extérieurs; qu'un culte forcé est un culte sacrilège qui perd celui qui l'exige et celui qui le rend. . . Je suis. . . ce que je crois devoir être en matière de religion. Ce n'est ni le nom de catholique ni le nom de protestant qui me détermine, c'est la connoissance de la vérité que je crois avoir acquise il y a longtemps par la faveur du ciel et par mes réflexions<sup>3</sup>." This is indeed the attitude of a man of intelligent and liberal spirit, but is not necessarily in contradiction with his seeming detestation of the deists.

Our information as to Prévost's stay in England is slight indeed. We are perhaps justified in concluding from the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* that he left France from

was sincere in this passage. But note that from the first number of the *Pour et Contre* the censor cut "ce qui concerne les affaires ecclésiastiques" (cf. *infra*, p. 23). This makes Prévost's position again doubtful, cf. *infra*, p. 40.

1. PC., VII, 308-12; X, 135-41.

2. *Œuvres*, II, 393.

3. *Id.*, p. 393 and p. 395.



Calais and crossed to Dover; that thence he proceeded by land to Gravesend, where he embarked on the Thames and landed at the foot of the Tower in London<sup>1</sup>. His apartment, like that of his hero, was perhaps in Suffolk Street<sup>2</sup>. No doubt he shortly found his way into the coffee houses, especially the Rainbow, where, as Sayous notes<sup>3</sup> in connection with Voltaire, French refugees had long been accustomed to gather. There Prévost, always a polite and pleasant companion, as Rousseau among others later noted<sup>4</sup>, could not fail to find at once friends ready to guide him in his first efforts to learn the language and the literature. Sayous refers to a supposed dispute between Voltaire and the Abbé Prévost, in regard to money due the former from certain subscriptions to the *Henriade*<sup>5</sup>. The whole affair has to do with another Prévost, a London bookseller. In fact it dates from March 1728<sup>6</sup>, and the Abbé, as we already know, did not arrive in England till November of the same year. Probably it was through friends made at the Rainbow that Prévost obtained a position as tutor to the son of an English nobleman. He no doubt had need of money, then as all his life. This nobleman, given in the *Mémoires du chevalier de Ravanne* simply as the "chevalier Ey...", is perhaps, as Harrissee suggests, Sir Robert Eyre, knighted in 1710, who died in 1735 leaving three sons<sup>7</sup>. With him, the same memoirs testify, Prévost enjoyed "tous les agrémens possibles"<sup>8</sup>. Thanks to this titled acquaintance he was able, according to his letter to Dom Clément de la Rue from The Hague, November 10, 1731, to move in "les meilleures compagnies de Londres"<sup>9</sup>. It is at this same time that he began

1. *Œuvres*, II, pp. 244-45.

2. *Id.*, p. 246.

3. Sayous, *le Dix-huitième siècle à l'étranger*, I, p. 21.

4. *Œuvres de Rousseau*. Hachette, 1862, Vol. V, p. 578 (*Confessions*).

5. Sayous, Vol. I, p. 21, note 1.

6. Collins, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79.

7. Harrissee, p. 143, note 1.

8. *Id.*, p. 143.

9. *Id.*, p. 161.

to go to the theater, for Mrs. Oldfield, whose acting charmed him so much, died in 1730.

Some time during this first stay in England Prévost made an extended trip through the southern part of the island, for of it he gives an account in the continuation of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, which appeared in 1731. It is not at all improbable that it was a journey taken in the company of his youthful charge. In fact it is unlikely, in spite of the recent sale of the first four volumes of his novel, that the Abbé would have been able otherwise to afford it. It seems most reasonable to conclude that in this case he is largely autobiographical. Certainly as an agreeable Mentor, enjoying himself well at Tunbridge and at Bath, present at masquerades, mingling at dances, and well received and entertained everywhere, Prévost would have been very much in character. His account gives the impression of dealing with things seen and not of being a mere compilation from a guide-book, but the descriptions lack color and visual detail. It is too early in the century, however, to expect this to be otherwise. Prévost's route took him from Tunbridge down to the south coast, where, to mention only the principal places, he visited Hastings, Portsmouth, Southampton, Plymouth<sup>1</sup>, the tin and copper mines of Cornwall, then turned north to Bristol, Bath, Oxford, Windsor, and back to London. Later he mentions passing through Canterbury. Thus he has made a circuit which takes him through all the southern part of England, but, with the exception of the detour to visit Oxford, has apparently not gone north of London at all<sup>2</sup>.

Prévost's opinion of the English character, as he expressed it in the *Mémoires* at various times, was in the main very favorable. Perhaps M. Schröder has tended to give a somewhat erroneous impression, however, by placing in his text one of

1. At Stanehouse, near Plymouth, he found a colony of poor French refugees supported in comparative comfort by the generosity of an English nobleman named Hedgecombe. *Œuvres*, II, 367-68.

2. *Id.*, 244-391.



the most enthusiastic passages and by relegating to the notes the following saner and more balanced judgment: "Il n'y a point de pays où l'on trouve tant de droiture, tant d'humanité, des idées si justes d'honneur, de sagesse et de félicité que parmi les Anglois. L'amour du bien public, le goût des sciences solides, l'horreur de l'esclavage et de la flatterie sont des vertus presque naturelles à ces peuples heureux; elles passent de père en fils comme un héritage. Mais il ne faut chercher les Anglois dont je parle, ni parmi la populace, qui est trop grossière et trop féroce en Angleterre pour être capable de ces grands sentiments, ni parmi la jeunesse, qui y est d'ordinaire extrêmement libertine. Ce n'est que dans un certain âge, et dans une certaine élévation au-dessus du commun, qu'on aperçoit le vrai caractère des Anglois: si vous les regardez dans ce point de vue, j'ose vous répondre que plus vous viendrez à les connoître, plus vous vous accoutumerez à les estimer comme un des premiers peuples de l'univers<sup>1</sup>." As he has begun with this passage, Prévost can later take it for granted and, if he seems to speak with unreserved enthusiasm, he has in mind only the Englishmen who belong to the very limited class defined above. It appears then that Prévost has seen and judged accurately without over-enthusiasm. As for Montesquieu, praised as having seen through the mask and judged England with so much greater penetration than either Voltaire or Prévost<sup>2</sup>, it is not out of place to make the observation that it is no less a lack of insight to see only the dark side and to find nothing worthy of praise, than it is possibly to err somewhat on the side of charity and enthusiasm.

On the literary side, what new conditions would Prévost meet, fresh from France, where, the memory of the "grand siècle" still largely dominant, the new century had not yet found its way? The age of Dryden was past, though his influence was not. The new age was one of gradually in-

1. *Œuvres*, II, 258-59. Cf. Schröder, pp. 41-42, and p. 40, note 1.

2. *Id.*, pp. 45-46.

creasing freedom and independence for literary men. No longer must they rely entirely upon the pensions accorded by noblemen in return for flattery. Pope, as Beljame has shown <sup>1</sup>, was the first really independent man of letters making his living wholly by the receipts from the sale of his books. Dryden before him had been obliged to seek pensions; Addison, the next author of first rank, had been rewarded by a post under the government, as other authors of his time had also been — or if not, then, like Swift, had sought to be; but Pope refused all aids and relied solely on his pen: he alone forecasts the modern age. It is worth while to recall that Prévost likewise, when he returned to France, supported himself by his writing. His position with the Prince de Conti paid him, unlike some other sinecures of the time and since, nothing.

It was in England a period of increasing morality in literature. The wild licence of the Restoration drama — essentially a court drama — had taken little hold upon the people. Objectors had been found to its immorality even before Jeremy Collier, relying for his arguments upon the critic Rymer, pressed home the attack in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). The violence and fierceness of his warfare were equal to the greatness of the evil and were so effective as to force *amende honorable* even from the aged Dryden, the literary lord of his age <sup>2</sup>. It is doubtful, nevertheless, whether Collier would have had any such effect, out of all proportion to his intrinsic merits, if the people as a whole had not supported the reform. As a matter of fact the bloodless revolution of 1688 had brought new liberty, not only in politics, but also in literature. Newspapers were beginning to be published and read. With the next

1. Beljame, *Le public et les hommes de lettres en Angleterre*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd. 1897.

2. But "the plays denounced by Collier continued to hold the stage, though more or less expurgated, throughout the century. Comedy did not become decent." Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 62. Cf. later the constant criticisms of Prévost regarding the indecencies of English comedy.



century came the periodicals of Addison and Steele, and these meant a wider reading public and worked also toward the reform of manners. Steele and later Lillo<sup>1</sup> popularized a moralizing element in the drama, which, though not of the highest literary merit, is most significant and is to be reckoned with. Richardson in the novel is part of the same movement, and Prévost, we recall, is the translator of Richardson. The new age was a people's age and took itself seriously. As such it was an age particularly of literary criticism<sup>2</sup>. The new public was anxious to be taught the way it should go in things literary.

The period of classicism in English literature by no means began with the return of the cavaliers under Charles II<sup>3</sup>. Contemporary with Shakespeare, the romantic, had been Ben Jonson, the classicist, and, in his quality of literary dictator, he had formed a school. The Restoration had but strengthened a tendency which, for the simple reason that genius to support the other side was lacking, had already become dominant. It is during this period that Dryden's becomes the prevailing voice in criticism. He belongs, not to any particular school, but to all<sup>4</sup>. His tendency is, now classic, now romantic, but usually he is a large free spirit, erring and changing often in the application of his principles to individual cases, but inclined generally to be open-minded and appreciative, a worthy father of later schools. Contemporary with him was Thomas Rymer, whom Macaulay and Professor Saintsbury have called "the worst critic that ever lived<sup>5</sup>," but who was none the less in his time a mighty force, inspiring the method of Collier's attacks and lending Voltaire, "not only the startling vocabulary of abuse but the critical method with which the

Indeed!

1. In *George Barnwell or the London Merchant*, 1731.

2. Paul Hamelius, *Die Kritik in der englischen Literatur des sieben- und achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 69.

3. *Id.*, p. 184.

4. *Id.*, p. 63.

5. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. I, Introd., p. LXXX.



great Frenchman attacked Shakespear<sup>1</sup>. "Pope admired him, though he admired Shakespear too, whom Rymer attacked. The reason for this seeming anomaly is that under classicism a man's position as a critic depended, not on his individual dicta, but on his general principles and doctrine<sup>2</sup>. Rymer's criticism by precept and rule was fought by Saint-Evremond, who urged criticism by comparison<sup>3</sup>. Saint-Evremond and Fontenelle were at the end of the seventeenth century the chief exponents of the theory of the influence of climate upon literary canons of taste — an idea which was as old as Aristotle's time, but which had languished. Now it came to the fore and became gradually a reiterated slogan in the eighteenth century, after being taken up by the Abbé Du Bos and (thirty years later) by Montesquieu<sup>4</sup>. From Saint-Evremond, Dryden got his interest in the theory, and not only Dryden, but also John Dennis<sup>5</sup>, who in the early years of the eighteenth century was so important as to be called "*the critic*"<sup>6</sup>. His preface to the *Impartial Critick* has been called "perhaps the best of the expositions of the effects of climate on the literary temper of a race; a hint from Saint-Evremond has furnished him with a suggestive explanation for the differences between Greek and English tragedy<sup>7</sup>". Dennis stood to his age "as the champion of emotion as the basis of poetry, as an advocate of the exaltation and inspiration of the poet that so ill accorded with the prevailing spirit of the times that he was derisively dubbed 'Sir Longinus'<sup>8</sup>". Dennis in fact undertook against Rymer to

1. Spingarn, p. LXXVIII.

2. *Id.*, p. LXXX.

3. *Id.*, pp. LXV-VI.

4. Brunetière, *l'Evolution des genres*, Vol. I, pp. 144-45. Cf. Alfred Lombard, *l'Abbé Du Bos, un initiateur de la pensée moderne*, p. 89.

5. Spingarn, *op. cit.*, p. CII.

6. "[Dennis'] reputation would have gained rather than lost, had he published nothing during his last fifteen years." H. G. Paul, *John Dennis*, 1911, p. 113.

7. Spingarn, p. CII.

8. Paul, p. 134.

prove that Shakespear was a "great genius<sup>1</sup>." Sir William Temple likewise with his broad interests did much to encourage a more liberal conception of literature as a growth depending much upon the conditions under which it is produced<sup>2</sup>.

The gradual result of these liberalizing influences was to produce at the end of the seventeenth century what Professor Spingarn calls the "school of taste," which represents an advance from "a general and abstract treatment to the consideration of particular passages and details, from the criticism of 'faults' to that of 'beauties,' from the concept of reason to that of sentiment and taste<sup>3</sup>." Méré in France, with his insistence upon the supremacy of heart over mind in literary judgments, had championed it<sup>4</sup>; Bouhours and La Bruyère had adopted it, but only in a rationalized form which gave the primacy to reason after all<sup>5</sup> and invoked the same "bon sens" as Boileau. But in England at any rate the tendency found more favorable soil. There Saint-Evremond supported it with all his great influence<sup>6</sup>. Later Shaftesbury came to the fore as a representative of the same school<sup>7</sup>.

The new attitude is reflected in the more liberal treatment of Shakespear by minor critics like Rowe and Gildon. In 1709-1710 the former published the first edition of Shakespear intended for general circulation, and in the first volume printed an Essay on the Life of William Shakespear. He definitely takes a stand against Rymer and shows real appreciation of the poet's genius. Gildon had two essays which were published in the same collection of Shakespear's works. The first is called An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England, and the second, Remarks on the

1. Paul, p. 63.

2. *Id.*, p. 125.

3. Spingarn, p. cv.

4. Paul, p. 124.

5. Spingarn, p. xcvi.

6. *Id.*, p. xcvi.

7. *Id.*, p. cv.



Plays of Shakespear. Both of these also show appreciation of the English dramatist and sincere admiration for his "witchery," as Gildon expresses it, but he is much more hampered by the rules than Rowe and more occupied with blaming "faults." He is only partly free from the Rymer attitude.

Such were the tendencies in the air toward the end of the old century and the beginning of the new. It must not be imagined that the various movements were very distinctly separated nor that their adherents were necessarily conscious of the direction in which they were going. Gradually the different schools tended, as always, to come together into two<sup>1</sup> which correspond to the two ever existent types of mind, the romantic and the classic.

It was at this time that Addison came into prominence. Addison "vit — ce que ses prédécesseurs avaient seulement entrevu — que le journal littéraire avait un rôle spécial à jouer et une influence nouvelle à exercer sur la société qui l'environnait<sup>2</sup>." It is in this sense that we may say with Beljame: "Addison a inauguré . . . la critique littéraire<sup>3</sup>." He gathered up the leading tendencies of his age and gave them wide circulation among an average reading public unknown to Dryden and his contemporaries. Mr. Saudé notes that the circulation of the *Spectator* went as high as 14,000 copies a day<sup>4</sup>. Addison recognized the rights of the "natural genius," not merely to be tolerated occasionally as the exception, but to be admitted alongside of the "genius formed by rules." He popularized Milton<sup>5</sup>; along with Steele he led an active propaganda in favor of Shakespear, who it is true had, as Hettner has recalled<sup>6</sup> and Mr. Hamelius likewise<sup>7</sup>, not

1. Hamelius, p. 70.

2. Beljame, p. 278.

3. *Id.*, p. 311.

4. Emile Saudé, *Die Grundlagen der literarischen Kritik bei Joseph Addison*, p. 62.

5. Charlanne, *l'Influence française en Angleterre*, p. 566. Dennis had appreciated Milton before Addison, but his influence was less.

6. Hettner, Vol. I, p. 75.

7. Hamelius, p. 111.

been forgotten under the reign of Charles II, but who had suffered many perversions and inexcusable "adaptations<sup>1</sup>," Othello and Hamlet being almost the only plays which escaped<sup>2</sup>. So Addison did valuable service here. He also turned the eyes of his contemporaries toward medieval ballads, thus forecasting Percy and Scott<sup>3</sup>. A noteworthy sign of one sort of liberality is the mention of a girl who with "a natural sense" is "a better judge than a thousand critics<sup>4</sup>." In fragmentary fashion he popularized the historical viewpoint in literary criticism<sup>5</sup> and used at times the comparative method<sup>6</sup>, which had been advocated as early as Bacon and more recently by Saint-Evremond<sup>7</sup>.

Addison's success produced a great many papers and periodicals, more or less closely imitating the Spectator and the Tatler. At the time when Prévost came to England, there were many of these journals in circulation and the number was rapidly increasing. "Ils sont tellement à la mode," says Prévost, "que le nombre en augmente tous les jours<sup>8</sup>," but he thinks that, having multiplied so rapidly, they cannot fail soon to decline<sup>9</sup>. He even gives a brief sketch of the origin and development of English journalism, according naturally a place of special importance to the productions of Steele and Addison<sup>10</sup>. Among those periodicals treated with some detail in the *Pour et Contre* are the *Grubstreet Journal*, the *London Tatler*, the *Universal Spectator*, the *Bee*, the *Weekly Miscellany*, and the *Auditor*; many others are mentioned only,

1. Charlanne, pp. 568-72.

2. *Id.*, pp. 570-71.

3. Saudé, p. 63.

4. *Id.*, p. 11. Cf. Musset, "Après une lecture," *Poésies nouvelles* :

Et, que tous les pédants frappent leur tête creuse,  
Vive le mélodrame où Margot a pleuré !

5. Hamelius, p. 93.

6. Saudé, p. 14.

7. See *supra*, p. 14.

8. PC., I, 68.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. PC., XIX, pp. 297-300.



such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>1</sup>, the *Craftsman*<sup>2</sup>, etc. Prévost was obviously impressed by the number and variety of these publications in England as compared with France, and it was most natural that it should occur to him to found something of a similar nature in his own country. His respect for Addison and Steele as journalists is obvious<sup>3</sup>; it was a magazine of the better sort that he wished to found, giving, like them, particular attention to things literary. Of this more will be said later. Here it is sufficient to note that one of the most important results of Prévost's English sojourn was the idea of producing a literary magazine such as the *Pour et Contre*.

The time of Prévost's arrival in England was especially favorable. The classic tendency had been aided by the introduction of French influence after the Restoration. In the end, though not immediately, this influence was beneficial. The English genius had need of pruning from Elizabethan youthful freedom. Moreover, the very deformation in part of English literary taste was necessary in order to make possible the entry in turn of English influence into France and in order to make there effective the vivifying tendency of English romanticism. In this wise, through France as intermediary, English literature was able to become European. The age of Pope made it possible ultimately, and perhaps sooner than otherwise would have been the case, to know in France the age of Shakespear also.

Prévost's English journeys came when the so-called Augustan period was nearing its close. Addison had died in 1719. Steele died in 1729, the same year as Congreve; Defoe in 1731; the critic, John Dennis, in 1734. Pope (1688-1744) and Swift (1667-1745) reigned supreme. Yet all of Pope's

1. Several times mentioned and quoted later, however.

2. One whole number translated later, but of a political, not of a literary, character. These references occur: PC., I, pp. 44-46, 33, and 258.

3. PC., I, pp. 69-70.

important work had been published, except the *Essay on Man*, and that came out anonymously before Prévost's return to France, three epistles in 1732-33 and a fourth in 1734. Swift's *Tale of a Tub* had appeared in 1704 and *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726. Thus his important work was done and, though he lived fifteen years thereafter, old age and sickness were heavy upon him. *Robinson Crusoe* had appeared in 1719<sup>1</sup>, Defoe's other novels during the twenties. In this connection it should be noted that Prévost makes no mention of Defoe nor of his work, either in the *Pour et Contre* or, as far as I have been able to discover, anywhere else. The fact that *Robinson Crusoe* was known in France from the time of its translation in 1720 is no explanation, since Prévost talked of other works which were generally known, the *Spectator* for instance. Given his keen taste for voyages, real or imaginary, there is no work which one would more readily expect to find him mentioning frequently and favorably. But, compared with Addison, Steele, Swift, and Pope, Defoe was socially only a poor scribbler, widely popular with the general reader but looked down upon by the aristocrats of letters. It may be that in this fact we find the reason for Prévost's neglect. In any case it seems that one must hesitate before concluding that Defoe influenced the French novelist, as M. Schrøder<sup>2</sup> and Mr. F. B. Bury<sup>3</sup> have thought. It is quite possible that there was such influence. It is probable enough that Prévost knew in England the translator of *Robinson Crusoe*, Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, but as yet we have no definite indication on which to base any positive conclusions.

The chief literary events during the actual period of Prévost's stay in England were: Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, which had a long run in 1728; Pope's *Dunciad*, which appeared the

1. Not "une vingtaine d'années avant l'arrivée de Prévost en Angleterre," as M. Schrøder has stated (p. 36, note 1).

2. P. 36.

3. "The Abbé Prévost in England", *Scottish Review*, 1899, p. 38 and p. 49.



such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>1</sup>, the *Craftsman*. Prévost was obviously impressed by the number and of these publications in England as compared with and it was most natural that it should occur to him something of a similar nature in his own country. For Addison and Steele as journalists is obvious<sup>2</sup> magazine of the better sort that he wished to found like them, particular attention to things literary. As will be said later. Here it is sufficient to note that most important results of Prévost's English sojourn idea of producing a literary magazine such as the *Concours*.

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1. Several times mentioned and quoted later, however.

2. One whole number translated later, but of a political history, character. These publications were PC., 3, 1717 and 258.

3. PC., 1, pp. 48-50.

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## Results

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## III. Results

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same year; Swift's terrible satire which is called *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burden to their Parents or the Country*, in 1729; Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, in 1730; and, in the same year, the founding of the *Grub Street Journal* and the appearance of Thompson's *Seasons*<sup>1</sup>; in 1731, one of Swift's best poems, *On the Death of Dr. Swift*<sup>2</sup>, the appearance of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and Lillo's great success, *George Barnwell or the London Merchant*; finally, in 1733-34, Pope's *Essay on Man*. One notes again with surprise that Thompson's work, the forerunner of romanticism, seems not to have impressed Prévost particularly. In vague and purely conventional fashion he mentions Prior, Addison, Thompson, as authors "qui ne sont inférieurs en rien aux meilleurs poètes de tous les temps" and as "noms chéris des Muses, et admirés de ceux qui connoissent le prix de leurs ouvrages"<sup>3</sup>.

M. Schröder states that Prévost left England for The Hague in 1729<sup>4</sup>, but there is some uncertainty about the exact date of his departure, and M. Schröder does not discuss the matter. HARRISSE was at first of the opinion that Prévost returned to Holland probably not later than January, 1731<sup>5</sup>, and perhaps as early as December, 1730. In his later work on the *Vie monastique de l'abbé Prévost*, he has altered slightly his conclusions. Prévost's letter of the tenth of November, 1731, to Dom Clément de la Rue contains the following passage: "C'est avec beaucoup de chagrin que je me suis vu privé ici du plaisir de voir Dom Thuillier. Je n'appris son arrivée qu'après son départ, et je suis très affligé d'entendre dire à plusieurs personnes qu'il étoit parti avec l'opinion que

1. *Winter* had been published in March, 1726; *Summer* was composed in 1727, and *Spring* in 1728. *Autumn* and a final *Hymn to Nature* appeared in the edition of 1730.

2. A pirated and incomplete version appeared in 1733, and an authorized copy in 1739. *Cambridge History*, IX, p. 137.

3. *MHQ.*, II, p. 282.

4. Schröder, p. 50.

5. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 151-70.

je l'avois évité à dessein de lui parler et de le voir. Le Ciel m'est témoin que c'eût été pour moi une très vive satisfaction ; et que j'ai fort regreté de l'avoir perdue. Quelle raison aurois-je eu de le fuir ? Je vis, grâces au Ciel, sans reproche. Tel en Hollande qu'à Paris<sup>1</sup>. " The time of Dom Thuillier's journey is important for our purpose. From HARRISSE's further investigations it results that, according to the temporary annalist of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Dom Martine, the journey was made in the fall of 1730. Dom Thuillier left Brussels the eighteenth of September, arrived at Rotterdam on the twentieth, and stayed a week. From there he went on to The Hague where, as HARRISSE thinks, he remained during the first week of October. From Prévost's brief account of his translation of De Thou's history, HARRISSE deduces the time of the Abbé's return from England. The task of the translation was first proposed to him in France, and Prévost continues: " Étant passé ensuite en Angleterre, la même proposition me fut renouvelée presque aussitôt . . . Deux ans s'écoulent, je viens en Hollande et j'y suis à peine arrivé que les propos renaissent<sup>2</sup>. " HARRISSE therefore concludes: " C'est dans la première quinzaine de novembre 1728 que Prévost passa de France en Angleterre. Les deux années qui s'écoulent nous reportent donc à novembre 1730, comme date de sa présence à La Haye. Dom Thuillier en était parti depuis environ trois semaines. De là les regrets très sincères de Prévost<sup>3</sup>. " However, it seems uncertain that Prévost's two years were intended to be taken quite so literally. Three weeks more or less would mean nothing where only approximate accuracy was probably intended. Furthermore, if at the time of Dom Thuillier's presence at The Hague Prévost was not yet back from England, why should the former not have known of the fact ? On the contrary, he evidently believed that Prévost was back on the continent, for he left the city

1. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 162.

2. Cited by HARRISSE, *la Vie monastique de l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 39-40.

3. *Id.*, p. 40.



thinking that the Abbé was intentionally avoiding him. Finally, if Prévost had not been in Holland, he would certainly have said so in his letter to De la Rue, for that fact would have constituted an excuse absolutely satisfactory and convincing, whereas he is able to state only: "Je n'appris son arrivée qu'après son départ." If Dom Thuillier thought he had reason to doubt Prévost's friendship and complete good faith, — and he evidently did think so, — then this excuse would appear to him much weaker and more doubtful than the other. So it seems reasonable to differ from HARRISSE to the extent of thinking it probable that Prévost was at The Hague during the latter part of September or the first part of October, 1730, but hardly much earlier in view of the two years which Prévost mentions as the duration of his first English visit. Thus his stay in England was of almost exactly the same length as Voltaire's had been<sup>1</sup>. During this first visit he had learned the language, attended the theater and become acquainted with the literature. He had composed *Cléveland* (most of the first four volumes), Volumes V and VI of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, and possibly *Manon Lescaut*<sup>2</sup>. He had toured most of southern England, been well received and made friends with whom he continued to keep in touch after his return<sup>3</sup>. In short it had been a pleasant and active period in his life.

1. Voltaire's visit lasted slightly less than two years, according to M. L. Foulet, who, in the *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France* (1906, p. 49), dates his arrival in England as August 15, 1726, and his return to France as the beginning of August, 1728. According to Mr. Churton Collins (*Voltaire... en Angleterre*, 1911, p. 7 and p. 109), Voltaire arrived in England probably May 30, 1726, and departed March 20 or 23, 1729. Cf. *infra*, p. 106, note 2.

2. This is the opinion of HARRISSE, *Vie monastique*, p. 17. On p. 26 he admits the possibility of the hypothesis that *Manon Lescaut* might have been composed at the Abbey of Saint-Ouen (1722-23), while the memory of the real Manon was freshest in his mind. Cf. my article, "The Date of Composition of *Manon Lescaut*," *Modern Language Notes*, Vol., XXXIII, pp. 150-54. In the absence of positive proof it seems that the balance of probability leans slightly toward the hypothesis that the masterpiece was composed at Saint-Ouen rather than in the already well-filled English period.

3. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 161.

In January 1733<sup>1</sup>, Prévost made a second journey to England. In the *Pour et Contre* he explains his departure vaguely. "Diverses raisons," he says, "m'ayant porté quelques mois après à quitter La Haye pour repasser en Angleterre<sup>2</sup>." HARRISSE has shown the untruth or malicious exaggeration in the various stories circulated about Prévost's departure "avec une suivante," etc. What part the "demoiselle de mérite et de naissance," as Prévost himself calls her<sup>3</sup>, may have had in his decision to leave Holland we do not know. It is quite probable, however, that reason for his departure may have existed in the debts which he himself acknowledged and which were due to his generosity. "C'est une chose assez connue, que ma fortune a toujours surpassé mes besoins, et que j'avois peu d'embarras à craindre pour moi-même, si j'eusse été moins sensible à ceux d'autrui<sup>4</sup>." Nor for this trait of character are we dependent only upon his own testimony<sup>5</sup>.

Once having arrived in London and with his pressing need of money very much in his mind, Prévost, in whom no doubt the project had been germinating ever since his first visit, set himself almost at once to retrieve his fortune by the publication of the periodical, *Le Pour et Contre*. It was printed in Paris. The opening number was presented by Didot and approved the twenty-fourth of March, 1733, but only after the cutting out of "ce qui concerne les affaires ecclésiastiques." The privilege was of the seventeenth of June, and on the twenty-first the new periodical was mentioned by the *Journal de la Cour et de Paris*<sup>6</sup>. Toward the end of this year 1733, Prévost appealed to the Pope for pardon<sup>7</sup>. According to

1. HARRISSE, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 188-90.

2. PC., IV, 43.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

5. Even his enemy, RAVANNE, on his own testimony never received anything but favors and loans from Prévost. HARRISSE, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

6. HARRISSE, pp. 209-10.

7. *Id.*, p. 221.



Harris's hypothesis, the Abbé returned to France secretly during the summer of 1734<sup>1</sup>. In any case a letter from Marais to Bouhier testifies to his being back in Paris by the eleventh of October with a brief of translation to Cluny. "Sa première visite a été chez madame de Tencin comme de raison<sup>2</sup>."

Thus his second sojourn in England had lasted about a year and a half, from the beginning of 1733 to the middle of 1734. Altogether he had spent three years and a half on the other side of the Channel. His preparation for the task of popularization was excellent<sup>3</sup>.

1. Harris, p. 228.

2. *Id.*, p. 229.

3. It may be interesting to note the most important plays presented during Prévost's residence in England, as given by Genest, Vol. III. Many bills are lacking so that Genest's list is not complete. Gaps might perhaps be filled by reference to the daily papers of the time, but these are not accessible to me.

Macbeth, Tempest, King Lear, Henry IV (Part I and Part II), Julius Caesar, Merry Wives, Measure for Measure, Jew of Venice, Othello, Timon of Athens, Henry VIII, Hamlet, Richard III, Troilus and Cressida, Careless Husband (Cibber), Cato (Addison), All for Love (Dryden), Provoked Wife (Vanbrugh), Silent Woman (Jonson), Volpone (Jonson), Alchemist (Jonson), Country Wife (Wycherley), Oedipus (Dryden and Lee), Old Bachelor (Congreve), Beggar's Opera (Gay), Drummer (Steele), Venice Preserved (Otway), Double Dealer (Congreve), Recruiting Officer (Farquhar), Mourning Bride (Congreve), Provoked Husband (Vanbrugh and Cibber), Constant Couple (Farquhar), Fair Penitent (Rowe), Way of the World (Congreve), Oronooko (Southerne), Jane Shore (Rowe), Tender Husband (Steele; with Mrs. Oldfield), Provoked Wife (with Mrs. Oldfield; her last performance, according to Curll; Genest, III, 259), Conscious Lovers (Steele), Plain Dealer (Wycherley), The London Merchant (Lillo).

The period included is November 11, 1728, to October, 1730, and January 27, 1733, to May 24, 1734.

It is to be noted that among the important tragedies of Shakespear not appearing are Romeo and Juliet, and Antony and Cleopatra (probably supplanted by Dryden's All for Love); among the comedies missing are: Twelfth Night, the Taming of the Shrew, As You Like It, etc. It must not be concluded from the above list that others may not have been given for which the bills are now missing, nor that Prévost saw more than perhaps a relatively small number of those mentioned. Troilus and Cressida may be Dryden's reworking.

## CHAPTER II

PRÉVOST'S GENERAL AIM IN THE *POUR ET CONTRE*

Of his aim in the *Pour et Contre* Prévost writes thus : " Tout ce qui regarde les Lettres appartient à mon projet. Les livres et les auteurs en seront toujours la partie la plus noble ; mais je n'en exclus pas même les imprimeurs et les libraires <sup>1</sup>. " He outlines more exactly his plan. " Enfin, ce qui sera tout à fait particulier à cette feuille, je promets d'y insérer chaque fois quelque particularité intéressante touchant le génie des Anglois, les curiositez de Londres et des autres parties de l'isle, les progrès qu'on y fait tous les jours dans les sciences et les arts, et de traduire même quelquefois les plus belles scènes de leurs pièces de théâtre <sup>2</sup>. "

The public interest in things English had been increasing gradually since the beginning of the century. Already it was becoming keen, for Prévost counted upon the new publication " pour gagner du pain <sup>3</sup>, " and was not disappointed. Shortly he declared his wish to make particularly interesting " tout ce qui concerne l'état littéraire de l'Angleterre et de l'Allemagne <sup>4</sup>. " But the part devoted to Germany is relatively insignificant. Neither the public taste at this time nor Prévost's own preparation permitted it to be otherwise. To treat English literature, however, he was especially well equipped, and naturally enough wanted his reader to know it. " L'aveu que je vais faire, le préviendra peut-être en faveur de ma sincérité : c'est que sçachant la langue angloise, et faisant venir régulièrement de Londres toutes les feuilles périodiques qui sont comprises sous le nom de *News Papers*, je suis résolu pour enrichir la

1. PC., I, 121.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 11.

3. Letter from Marais to President Bouhier, July 11, 1733, cited by Harris, pp. 212-13.

4. PC., I, 217.



Plays of Shakespear. Both of these also show appreciation of the English dramatist and sincere admiration for his "witchery," as Gildon expresses it, but he is much more hampered by the rules than Rowe and more occupied with blaming "faults." He is only partly free from the Rymer attitude.

Such were the tendencies in the air toward the end of the old century and the beginning of the new. It must not be imagined that the various movements were very distinctly separated nor that their adherents were necessarily conscious of the direction in which they were going. Gradually the different schools tended, as always, to come together into two<sup>1</sup> which correspond to the two ever existent types of mind, the romantic and the classic.

It was at this time that Addison came into prominence. Addison "vit — ce que ses prédécesseurs avaient seulement entrevu — que le journal littéraire avait un rôle spécial à jouer et une influence nouvelle à exercer sur la société qui l'environnait<sup>2</sup>." It is in this sense that we may say with Beljame: "Addison a inauguré . . . la critique littéraire<sup>3</sup>." He gathered up the leading tendencies of his age and gave them wide circulation among an average reading public unknown to Dryden and his contemporaries. Mr. Saudé notes that the circulation of the *Spectator* went as high as 14,000 copies a day<sup>4</sup>. Addison recognized the rights of the "natural genius," not merely to be tolerated occasionally as the exception, but to be admitted alongside of the "genius formed by rules." He popularized Milton<sup>5</sup>; along with Steele he led an active propaganda in favor of Shakespear, who it is true had, as Hettner has recalled<sup>6</sup> and Mr. Hamelius likewise<sup>7</sup>, not

1. Hamelius, p. 70.

2. Beljame, p. 278.

3. *Id.*, p. 311.

4. Emile Saudé, *Die Grundlagen der literarischen Kritik bei Joseph Addison*, p. 62.

5. Charlanne, *l'Influence française en Angleterre*, p. 566. Dennis had appreciated Milton before Addison, but his influence was less.

6. Hettner, Vol. I, p. 75.

7. Hamelius, p. 111.

been forgotten under the reign of Charles II, but who had suffered many perversions and inexcusable "adaptations<sup>1</sup>," Othello and Hamlet being almost the only plays which escaped<sup>2</sup>. So Addison did valuable service here. He also turned the eyes of his contemporaries toward medieval ballads, thus forecasting Percy and Scott<sup>3</sup>. A noteworthy sign of one sort of liberality is the mention of a girl who with "a natural sense" is "a better judge than a thousand critics<sup>4</sup>." In fragmentary fashion he popularized the historical viewpoint in literary criticism<sup>5</sup> and used at times the comparative method<sup>6</sup>, which had been advocated as early as Bacon and more recently by Saint-Evremond<sup>7</sup>.

Addison's success produced a great many papers and periodicals, more or less closely imitating the Spectator and the Tatler. At the time when Prévost came to England, there were many of these journals in circulation and the number was rapidly increasing. "Ils sont tellement à la mode," says Prévost, "que le nombre en augmente tous les jours<sup>8</sup>," but he thinks that, having multiplied so rapidly, they cannot fail soon to decline<sup>9</sup>. He even gives a brief sketch of the origin and development of English journalism, according naturally a place of special importance to the productions of Steele and Addison<sup>10</sup>. Among those periodicals treated with some detail in the *Pour et Contre* are the *Grubstreet Journal*, the *London Tatler*, the *Universal Spectator*, the *Bee*, the *Weekly Miscellany*, and the *Auditor*; many others are mentioned only,

1. Charlanne, pp. 568-72.

2. *Id.*, pp. 570-71.

3. Saudé, p. 63.

4. *Id.*, p. 11. Cf. Musset, "Après une lecture," *Poésies nouvelles* :

Et, que tous les pédants frappent leur tête creuse,  
Vive le mélodrame où Margot a pleuré !

5. Hamelius, p. 93.

6. Saudé, p. 14.

7. See *supra*, p. 14.

8. PC., I, 68.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. PC., XIX, pp. 297-300.



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8. PC., I, 68.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10. PC., XIX, pp. 297-300.



carrière par la seconde feuille du tome dix-septième, s'est trouvé obligé, par d'autres occupations, d'abandonner son entreprise en finissant le tome XVIII. Cependant comme il restoit cette feuille de lui entre les mains du libraire, on n'a pas laissé de l'insérer ici ; celui qui lui succède promet plus de variété, et tiendra d'autant mieux parole qu'il sait l'Anglois, et quelques autres langues, comme le premier auteur <sup>1</sup>. "

The other passage is as follows : " On s'est figuré, par exemple, que le détail qui regarde M. de Tréville au XIV. livre de Cléveland ne porte sur rien de réel. Voici la source où je l'ai puisé <sup>2</sup>. "

The reference above to the " premier auteur, " taken together with the following, might well add to the confusion. We read : " Quand l'ancienne méthode du *Pour et Contre* n'auroit point eu d'autre avantage que celui de nous faire connoître assez régulièrement ce qui se passe chez nos voisins, je m'applaudirois de l'avoir rétablie, et de m'être mis en état de rendre le même service à la France <sup>3</sup>. "

A little later comes this passage : " J'entre avec tant de soin dans la méthode du premier auteur de cet ouvrage, que ceux qui l'ont goûtée n'auront pas de peine à la reconnoître <sup>4</sup>. "

There is room here for confusion, but these statements hardly constitute a sufficient ground for rejecting the positive assertion (cited *supra*, page 29) that the author of Volumes XIX and XX was the same as the author of Volumes I and III-XVI, that is to say, Prévost himself. Rather the above passages seem to be due only to a desire to preserve for a time a quasi-anonymity, perhaps merely for the pleasure of seeing the public recognize from the improvement in form and content that the first author had resumed the editorship. The last pas-

1. PC., XIX, 48. HARRISSE in quoting this passage read it incorrectly " la seconde feuille du tome XVIII. " instead of " dix-septième, " as it should be. HARRISSE, page 296. This has led him into another slight misstatement regarding the authorship. See *infra*.

2. *Ibid.*, XVII, 40. Cf. also pp. 11, 13, 16, 23-24.

3. *Ibid.*, XIX, 121-22. Note the discreet self-praise.

4. *Ibid.*, XIX, 143.

sage cited points somewhat to this interpretation. It is also borne out by Prévost's statement after the former interruption, when he was returning to the editorship in Volume III. He speaks of the "facilité avec laquelle j'apprens que le public a reconnu, que les dernières feuilles du *Pour et Contre* sont d'une autre main que la mienne<sup>1</sup>." A more substantial reason may lie in the fact that in 1739-40 Prévost was extremely embarrassed financially and being pursued by his creditors. He may well have been glad to try to preserve his anonymity as long as possible. His situation did in fact become so desperate that he was driven to seek the aid of Voltaire, which, in spite of the latter's previous warm protestations of friendship<sup>2</sup>, Prévost did not obtain<sup>3</sup>.

From the above argument, then, it results that Prévost was the author of the greater part of the *Pour et Contre*, but that he did not write the following: Volume II, p. 83 to end, and Volume III, pp. 1-48; Volume XVII, p. 25 to end, and Volume XVIII; Volume XIX, pp. 25-48.

The first gap (Volumes II-III) was bridged over by the Abbé Desfontaines. Marais wrote to President Bouhier, January 9, 1734: "Il y a une anecdote sur le *Pour et Contre*. Le moine renié [Prévost] s'est brouillé avec le libraire de France [François Didot]. Ce temps a été rempli par l'abbé Desfon-

1. PC., III, 50.

2. See Voltaire's Correspondence, March 4 and 20, 1736, August 4 and November 27, 1738.

3. Prévost wrote to Voltaire, January 15, 1740, describing his unhappy situation. "Le dérangement de mes affaires est tel que, si le ciel, ou quelqu'un inspiré de lui, n'y met ordre, je suis à la veille de repasser en Angleterre. Je ne m'en plaindrais pas si c'était ma faute; mais depuis cinq ans que je suis en France, avec autant d'amis qu'il y a d'honnêtes gens à Paris, avec la protection d'un prince du sang qui me loge dans son hôtel, je suis encore sans un bénéfice de cinq sous. Je dois environ cinquante louis, pour lesquels mes créanciers réunis m'ont fait assigner, etc.; et le cas est si pressant qu'étant convenu avec eux d'un terme qui expire le premier du mois prochain, je suis menacé d'un décret de prise de corps si je ne les satisfais pas dans ce temps." Voltaire's Correspondence, Jan. 15, 1740. Voltaire evidently did not class himself among the "inspirés du ciel," for he politely refused the request.



taines<sup>1</sup>. The second change, as we have already seen<sup>2</sup>, put the editorship into the hands of Lefèvre de Saint-Marc. From the misreading "XVIII<sup>e</sup>" for "dix-septième" (the second numeral is written out in the *Pour et Contre* passage, thus making its correctness conclusive), and from the fact that the title page of Volume XVIII bore the initials M. D. S. M. (M. de Saint-Marc), while Volume XVII did not, HARRISSE concluded that only XVIII was by Saint-Marc and that XVII was by some other person of unknown name<sup>3</sup>. There no longer appears any reason for this theory.

It has been necessary to go into this question in some detail, not merely to establish for the purposes of this study the parts of the *Pour et Contre* really written by Prévost, but also because the weight of his name has been incorrectly attached to some of the criticism of Lefèvre de Saint-Marc<sup>4</sup>, an honor which the latter not only would have been, but actually was, the first to disclaim<sup>5</sup>.

1. Cited by HARRISSE, p. 246.

2. See *supra*, p. 28.

3. HARRISSE, p. 296.

4. C. F. ZEEK, JR., *Louis de Boissy*, Grenoble, 1914, p. 209, cites Prévost, *Pour et Contre*, XVIII, p. 25, apropos of Boissy's *les Talents à la mode*. This, as we have seen, is one of the parts of the periodical composed not by Prévost but by Saint-Marc.

5. PC., XVII, 97-99. "Je ne sais quelle espèce de remerciement je dois à ceux qui prétendent que les deux dernières feuilles du *Pour et Contre* sont de la même main que les autres. On ne pouvoit pas faire un éloge plus flatteur de ma manière d'écrire, que de la confondre avec celle de mon prédécesseur. Mais je sais me rendre justice; et bien que cette erreur me soit honorable, je n'ai garde de la laisser subsister. Un manque d'attention l'a produite; un peu de réflexion la détruiroit bientôt; et je craindrois qu'on ne finit par m'accuser d'avoir eu dessein d'en imposer en public. Je me hâte donc de le dire; je n'ai point eu la ridicule intention de faire croire que le *Pour et Contre* étoit toujours du même auteur. Beaucoup de ses lecteurs se sont d'abord aperçus de la différence, et sans doute à mon désavantage. Je sens moi-même combien cet ouvrage doit perdre entre mes mains.

"Je n'ai point cette imagination vive, étendue, féconde, qui saisissant fortement ce qu'elle voit, en représente au vrai tous les traits, et toujours avec le coloris de la nature. Je n'ai point ce stile énergique, animé, nerveux, qui sait prendre toutes sortes de formes, et donner aux pensées, aux sentimens, aux images un tour vraiment original, et toujours sûr de plaire. Je n'ai point ce riche amas de connoissances de tout

## CHAPTER IV

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF PRÉVOST'S CRITICISM

In his thesis on Marivaux, G. Larroumet speaks of Prévost's literary criticism in these terms: "Sauf l'abbé Prévost, généralement judicieux, impartial, et assez large, la critique est très médiocrement représentée jusqu'aux environs de 1750. Desfontaines, Boindin, Clément, etc. étaient de médiocres censeurs et de pauvres caractères, plus gazetiers que littérateurs. Les critiques de ce nom n'apparaissent que dans la seconde moitié du siècle, où d'Alembert, Grimm, La Harpe, Chamfort, Marmontel relèvent une profession avilie<sup>1</sup>."

It is in the very first number of the *Pour et Contre* that Prévost announces his policy of fairness: "Si je parle d'un ouvrage d'esprit, je tâcherai d'en faire l'éloge avec la même sincérité que la critique<sup>2</sup>." We shall have occasion later to see whether he tries really to live up to this program, or

genre, cette heureuse et fidèle mémoire, cette facilité prodigieuse, qui suffisent à tout, et qui par le mélange judicieux de l'agréable et de l'utile, produisent cette amusante et solide variété, qui fait autant d'honneur à l'écrivain, que de plaisir à ses lecteurs. Enfin, je ne connois rien en moi de ce qui porte les ouvrages de *M. l'Abbé Prévôt* à ce degré d'excellence, qu'il est plus aisé d'admirer, que d'atteindre. Et cependant je me charge de continuer ce qu'il abandonne. Que mon entreprise est téméraire! Elle l'est d'autant plus qu'il est le seul écrivain périodique; auquel mon amour propre m'avoit incapable de succéder. Ce n'est pas que je prétende rien dérober à la gloire des autres. Je veux dire uniquement que leur genre de travail convient mieux à ma sorte d'esprit, à mes faibles talents, aux études que j'ai faites. C'est pour cela même que j'ai commencé par en rapprocher le *Pour et Contre*."

A most interesting attitude toward Prévost which can be interpreted neither as sarcasm nor as due to a professional pose of modesty. Such depreciation of one's own abilities is possible only when the popularity of one's predecessor is really so great that it would be more dangerous not to acknowledge frankly his superiority. The necessity Prévost was in of taking up once more the editorship showed the truth of Saint-Marc's praise.

1. G. Larroumet, *Marivaux*, p. 451.

2. PC., I, 8.



whether it is merely one of those meaningless statements thrown out so often with greater or less sincerity by critics who are far from following them in their actual criticism. Prévost declares himself in zealous opposition to all false taste: " Je m'élève avec zèle contre les abus du bel esprit, et je prends le parti de la vérité et de la droite raison, contre le faux goût et contre l'ignorance <sup>1</sup>. "

This earnestness of purpose comes, it may be, from contact with English critics. No doubt at any rate that it was affected by them, for of the value of their work Prévost speaks as follows: " Il faut leur rendre là-dessus toute la justice qu'ils méritent. Le bon goût <sup>2</sup> s'est répandu parmi eux à force de faire la guerre à tout ce qui le blesse. Point de quartier pour le plat et pour le ridicule. Les impitoyables critiques que les Anglois! A peine un ouvrage voit-il le jour à Londres, qu'il devient comme la proie d'une infinité de plumes, qui n'attendoient que le moment de sa naissance. On ne l'épargne pas, soit religieux ou profane: il faut qu'il soit connu pour ce qu'il est, si c'est un sot ouvrage. Ils donnent pour raison, qu'il n'y a que cette manière d'extirper peu à peu les mauvais auteurs. Si l'on se contente de les laisser dans l'oubli où ils tombent d'eux-mêmes, une mort si douce les rend plus hardis. Il faut des exemples éclatans, disent-ils, sans quoi l'impunité augmente le nombre. Par cette rigoureuse méthode, combien de productions infortunées périssent tous les jours dès le berceau <sup>3</sup>! "

While approving the purpose of the English critics, Prévost does not care to imitate the violence of their criticisms which has caused the office of critic to be likened to that of the " bourreau <sup>4</sup>. " On the contrary, he mentions " le tour civil dont je tâche de revêtir ma critique ou mes éloges <sup>5</sup>, " " la

1. PC., III, 114.

2. Note that he gives the English credit for having good taste; this in itself is a new attitude to most Frenchmen of the period, and later.

3. PC., I, 35.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 350, note (a).

5. *Ibid.*, XIII, 167.

sincérité de ses louanges [du *Pour et Contre*] et la modération de sa critique <sup>1</sup>. " " J'évite, " he says, " autant qu'il m'est possible toutes sortes d'applications offencantes <sup>2</sup>. " Another passage reads : " Ceux qui m'ont fait l'honneur de lire jusqu'à présent mes petites productions, savent que le caractère de mon stile n'est point l'aigreur et la satire <sup>3</sup> ... J'ai respecté ma patrie. J'ai rendu justice au mérite et à la vertu. C'est une disposition dont je fais gloire, et je veux qu'il en paroisse quelque chose, à l'égard même de mes ennemis <sup>4</sup>. "

Although the very title *Le Pour et Contre* obligated him to treat both sides of every question, and though by this method he hoped — vainly enough of course — to offend no one <sup>5</sup>, yet Prévost is far from falling into the " littleness of this patchy, yea-nay criticism " inveighed against by Saintsbury <sup>6</sup>. " Je crois pouvoir me flater que les lecteurs sans prévention auront remarqué aisément dans mes feuilles une envie constante de faire valoir le bon des ouvrages dont je parle, plutôt que des efforts pour y faire découvrir des défauts <sup>7</sup>. " There is a desire also to get beneath the surface and appreciate an author's merit justly without being blinded by his faults. " La critique la plus difficile n'est pas celle qui fait distinguer le bien du mal ou le bon écrivain du mauvais. Il y a un discerne-

1. PC., VI, 83.

2. *Ibid.*, IV, 209.

3. In PC., II, 143, while Prévost was not the editor, appeared this criticism of Bruys' *Histoire des Papes*: " C'est le livre le plus insensé qui soit jamais sorti de la plume d'un mauvais auteur. " Marais wrote to Bouhier : " Vous sentez bien, Monsieur, que ce n'est pas là de l'ex-bénédictin et que cela est digne de l'abbé (Desfontaines). " Cited by Harris, p. 218. Thus even Prévost's enemies acknowledged the truth of his own characterization of his style.

4. PC., IV, 33-34.

5. " Cette manière de traiter mes sujets, comme autant de problèmes dont j'abandonnerai toujours la décision au lecteur, me paraît si propre à satisfaire tout le monde, que j'ose me promettre de ne déplaire à personne. " PC., I, 9. Cf. also PC., VII, 4, note (a), cited *infra*. Prévost has seen the impracticability of his method.

6. Saintsbury, *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, Vol. II, p. 434.

7. PC., XV, 200. Cf. *supra*, p. 13, the school taste in England.



ment plus délicat qui consiste à déterminer les différens degrez du bien, et qui mesure moins le mérite par la distance où il est du mauvais ou du médiocre, que par les heureux traits qui le font approcher plus ou moins de la perfection<sup>1</sup>. " It is this cast of mind which will make Prévost's judgments of English literature fairer in general than those of Voltaire.

Prévost feels too the importance of literary criticism as a part of the journalist's duty. For him it is already almost a real genre apart<sup>2</sup>. " Il s'est trouvé des journalistes qui ont promis au public de ne prendre aucun parti sur le mérite des ouvrages, et d'en faire seulement l'extrait, en laissant le jugement aux lecteurs. Je n'en connais aucun qui ait tenu parole et je crois en effet cette indifférence si impossible, que c'est une des raisons qui me font mettre la critique au rang des principaux devoirs d'un journaliste<sup>3</sup>. " It is not strange therefore that his critical work should stand out from that of his contemporaries.

In a citation from Montaigne — and Prévost cites him frequently — we begin to see that the " rules " are not going to dominate the judgments of the author of the *Pour et Contre*. In fact, the passage in question puts literary opinions on what is practically an impressionistic basis. However cautious one may be now before such a doctrine, it was not without peculiar advantages when practiced in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the reaction against the rules, though beginning<sup>4</sup>, was still viewed with suspicion, not to say alarm, by many; and for a Frenchman about to make known to his countrymen the beauties of English literature it was essential that he should rid himself as far as possible of preconceived intellectual criteria and give free rein to his natural impulses. Here is Montaigne's

1. PC., IX, 103.

2. Probably English influence in this.

3. PC., VII, 4, note (a). Cf. *supra*. Prévost has seen that his policy of neutrality will not work.

4. See Mornet, " La question des règles au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, " *Revue d'Histoire litt. de la France*, 1914, pp. 241 and 542.

idea of taste — and to a degree at least Prévost's own. "On demande quelquefois ce que c'est que le goût. Écoutez Montaigne. Un ravissement, un ravage. Il n'est pas question de voir. Les yeux les plus ouverts et les plus fermes voyent-ils la splendeur d'un éclair? Ils sentent. Avoir du goût, c'est sentir par la vue, par l'ouïe, etc. Définissez-le mieux <sup>1</sup>. "

This invoking of Montaigne is particularly to be noted. Prévost cites him frequently. Later the Abbé Le Blanc, whose *Lettres d'un François* were published in 1745 and written from 1738 to 1744, does the same. Voltaire of course underwent his profoundly liberalizing influence. Montaigne in the eighteenth century came into his own. His was a spirit deeply convinced that everything in literature and in morals is relative, not absolute. So his influence was directed full-tilt against all which the seventeenth century had erected as definite and unchanging, and against all which in the eighteenth century, and in the first half particularly, still was molded upon that absolute ideal. Among those influences which tended to emancipate Prévost from established prejudices, we must by no means fail to consider Montaigne as very important.

Some one may object that the following passage takes away much from our idea of the seriousness of Prévost's purpose. "A l'égard de ma feuille, je me soumets volontiers au jugement que mes lecteurs en peuvent porter. Le seul mérite que je lui souhaite est de leur plaire. C'est un ouvrage d'amusement pour eux et pour moi; et je confesse que ceux qui feroient monter sa valeur au-delà, m'accorderoient plus que je ne leur demande <sup>2</sup>. " It is, however, essential to note, not only that this is but one against many of a contrary character, but especially that it is written by way of defense against the criticisms of an author aggrieved at being judged unfavorably, in the *Pour et Contre*. Furthermore, however sincere Prévost might be in intention, as the editor of a popular journal he

1. PC., VI, 213-14.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.



was at times compelled to be prudent, always impelled to please, so that we need not be surprised to find him softening down whatever the public might find too severe or too bold. This fact should constantly be considered in judging his work. Primarily he was a journalist, not a scholar.

But he did have a serious purpose in mind, and a definite one. This we have already seen. We may see it again in the following passage: "Ne différons donc plus à donner au *Pour et Contre* un but sérieux et régulier. Aussi simple dans ce choix que j'ai toujours tâché de l'être dans ma manière de penser et d'écrire, je me propose de faire remarquer la différence réelle et constante qui se trouve entre les pays de l'Europe où les sciences et les arts sont le mieux cultivés, et surtout entre la France et l'Angleterre... Un autre avantage du but que je me propose, c'est que les soixante nombres que je laisse derrière moi, peuvent naturellement s'y rapporter. Ainsi quoique j'aie marché comme au hasard dans les quatre volumes précédents, il se trouve que je n'ai point fait de pas inutiles <sup>1</sup>."

Prévost had very fully the cosmopolitan viewpoint. In the fifth volume of the *Pour et Contre* he makes his mouthpiece <sup>2</sup>, the English "ministre <sup>3</sup>," say: "Pour juger sainement de

1. PC., V, 6-7.

2. It is of course evident that caution must always be observed in making an author responsible for the opinions he puts into the mouth of one of his characters. Thus Texte, in his *J. J. Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire* (p. 124 and pp. 130-31), has gone too far when he interprets some of Bomston's most exaggerated expressions in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* as being Rousseau's own attitude toward the English, when they are only in the character of the speaker. But that the "ministre" does here express Prévost's own ideas we have convincing proof, not only in the passage cited *infra* from PC., XX, 69, which indicates the same attitude of mind, but also in the following: "Mais avec le droit que je me suis réservé de n'être pas toujours de même sentiment que lui [le ministre], j'aurai soin de réduire du moins ses thèses en problèmes, et de ne rien approuver qui ne soit conforme aux principes de religion, de bienséance et de vérité, qui sont établis parmi nous. Il ne me paroît pas jusqu'à présent qu'il s'en soit écarté." PC., V, 42-43.

3. Apparently a reminiscence of Addison's methods.



nos ouvrages d'esprit, ils [les Français] doivent avoir égard à nos usages et à nos mœurs... Or je doute que la différence ait jamais été plus grande entre les usages de l'ancienne Grèce et ceux de la France, qu'elle l'est entre ceux de Paris et de Londres. On auroit mauvaise grace de nous objecter, que vivant dans le même siècle, c'est notre faute si nous n'avons pas aujourd'hui plus de conformité avec les François. Il faudroit avoir décidé auparavant que leurs usages sont plus estimables que les nôtres, et que ce ne sont pas les Anglois qui méritent effectivement qu'on aspire à leur ressembler<sup>1</sup>. " The same idea is later repeated for emphasis. " Mais je ne répéterai point ce que j'ai dit mille fois sur la nécessité de connoître non seulement le goût et les principes, mais les affaires et les intérêts d'une nation, pour juger du droit qu'une pièce a d'y être applaudie<sup>2</sup>. "

In the words of the Minister and in those of Prévost himself expression is given to the theory of relativity, the relation of literature to institutions and manners, and its dependence upon them. The same idea which we have already had occasion to note in Montaigne is found in Fénelon's *Lettre à l'Académie*<sup>3</sup>, written in 1714, published in 1716, and it is worth while to call attention to the fact that Prévost and Fénelon have much in common in their suppleness of mind, their politeness and charm of manner, their easy style, and their general largeness of taste.

But whatever influences may have come to Prévost through the ordinary channels of literature, it is impossible to overlook the fact that a great deal is due also to the circumstances of his life, which was varied and active and which early put him in a position to observe the manners and mode of thought of different people and different orders of society. What he has thus learned he wishes to bring back to his own country

1. PC., V, 32-33.

2. *Ibid.*, XX, 69.

3. " Chaque nation a ses mœurs, très différentes de celles des peuples voisins. " Fénelon, *Œuvres*, II, 349.

in order that the French people may understand foreign literatures, character and manners, and perfect their own taste. It is significant that Prévost does not hold that everything in disaccord with French rules is necessarily wrong. On the contrary, he believes that the French can really benefit by this familiarity with other modes of thought, for he observes that " tout ce qui peut servir à l'histoire du goût dans les différens siècles, est extrêmement propre à régler le nôtre, et convient particulièrement à cette feuille <sup>1</sup>. "

This " tout, " however, had its very definite limits. Prévost, like Figaro, knew that he must speak only of safe things — another reason for giving literature a dominant place, for, violent as literary quarrels were likely to be at that time, they were not apt to bring about dangerous difficulties with the civil authorities. There were two subjects of the utmost importance and interest which he felt constrained to avoid. " La seule chose à regretter est que je me sois interdit toutes les matières de religion et de politique; car c'est surtout à l'égard de ces deux articles que les Anglois se piquent d'une singularité brillante; mais le tort que je fais à mes lecteurs en m'imposant cette loi, n'égale point celui que je pourrois leur causer en la violant <sup>2</sup>. " It was the first half of the century, when English philosophy, English tolerance, and the English constitution were the things most admired in France, rather than English *belles lettres*. Thus, for various reasons, Prévost is exerting his influence in another direction calculated to prepare the stronger current of literary admiration characteristic of the second part of the century.

1. PC., XIV., 356.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 54. For the political side, cf. the Spectator, cited by Beljame, p. 286: " Je n'ai jamais épousé les idées d'aucun parti avec violence et je suis résolu à observer une neutralité absolue entre les whigs et les tories. " The silence on religious matters may well be due after all to necessity. Note that the first number of the *Pour et Contre* was approved only after a censoring out of " ce qui regarde les affaires ecclésiastiques. " HARRISSE, p. 240.



## CHAPTER V

## PRÉVOST'S PREPARATION

A word, before passing on, regarding the Abbé's preparation for treating the particular subject in hand. How well did he know the English language? Texte tells us that "Prévost, forcé de vivre en Angleterre et d'y gagner sa vie, s'y anglicisa plus qu'aucun autre écrivain du dix-huitième siècle. Il apprit à fond la langue du pays, et de ce jour, se fit traducteur gagé des livres anglais <sup>1</sup>." Whether he was, as Texte says, without equal in the whole course of the eighteenth century may well be questionable, but all the evidence that we have indicates at the least that Prévost did learn English very well indeed. There are some curious details regarding the method he employed <sup>2</sup>. In two days (!) he learned the necessary rudiments of the grammar, and the declensions and conjugations. Then, putting aside his grammar, he set himself to acquire a vocabulary. Dividing the words to be learned into five classes, verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions, he wrote them out on large sheets of paper in parallel columns with the French and hung them on the wall where he could see them conveniently while getting ready for bed. Each morning he tested himself on those learned the night before. After two weeks spent in this way, he began reading easy prose with the aid of a dictionary. At this time also he began spending a regular part of his day reading aloud before some Englishman who could make the necessary corrections. Within a month from the time he started he was able to read all kinds of prose, and only then did he set himself to mastering the grammatical rules, their exceptions and complexities.

1. Texte, *Rousseau et... Cosmopolitisme litt.*, p. 54.

2. PC., XVI, 327-33.



This method, as he describes it, seems to indicate a practical bent and a readiness to break with tradition, if it appeared desirable, and to block out new methods. Of course it is quite certain that in his mode of statement Prévost has fallen into naïve exaggeration, especially in the matter of the short time in which he gained a perfect knowledge of the language, and this might easily make the whole appear ridiculous. Prévost shows, however, a knowledge of the value of our subconscious processes which is worthy of praise. Speaking of the reason why he memorized vocabulary just before going to bed, he says: "Car c'est le tems le plus favorable à la mémoire, parce que le repos du sommeil sert ensuite à confirmer les traces du cerveau <sup>1</sup>."

Of his translations we shall have more to say later. They show that he understood the language well, and the deviations from the original are due to intention and not to ignorance, except perhaps in one case noted in connection with his translation of the Hamlet soliloquy. As further evidence of the success of his method — with him at any rate — we have a letter written by Prévost to Thieriot in English. It has been published with the correspondence of Voltaire and also by Harris in his volume on Prévost.

"De l'abbaye de la Croix-Saint-Leufroy, novembre 1735.

"I receiv'd your *Magazines*, Jacob's works <sup>2</sup>, etc. and every thing shall be kept in good order to return in your hands when I'm at Paris. But why don't you send what you spoke to me of, concerning Mr. Voltaire and cardinal Alberoni's letter? You may be sure I shall make the best use of it which is in my power. Perhaps you are angry at me, for not having spoken of *Julius Caesar's death*, and the wrong edition of it; but Dear Sir if you remember that the same week I receiv'd your letter, your very same account of M. Voltaire's Tragedy was publish'd in the *Observations upon the modern*

1. PC., p. 329.

2. Hildebrand Jacob, criticized later in PC., IX, 188-208; XIX, 182-92; 351-53.

*Writings*, by no means you can't take ill that I would not be another's *Écho*, and humbly repeat what M. Desfontaines had told before me. There is no occasion wherein I'm not ready to declare myself one of Mr. Voltaire's admirers, though I'm told lately he has not spoke of me in the best terms of the world ; but my heart if not my merit, is above these little trifles. I'm quite unknown to Mr. Voltaire, and I'm as bold as to say that no body who knows both my person and my way of thinking and living can hate or condemn me.

" You expect no news from a poor countryman, who thinks himself alone upon the earth, so out of use he is of seeing men or women in the most solitary place of the world. When you have nothing better to do, could not you write to me, as bad and carelessly as you please, what you hear and see every day at Paris? I'm condemn'd to live here to the 10<sup>th</sup>. of december, and no sollicitations could prevail on the Pope to lessen my spiritual punishment.

" Cleveland and that dear Fanny are not out of my mind, but great many <sup>1</sup> friends of mine, on whoose counsels and wisdom I rely, advised me to publish no love-worcks til my retreat be over. T'is the only reason why the second part of *Killerine* has not been printed yet.

" No compliments for your *Phyché* (*sic*), since you think it so dangerous for my repose. I wo'nt see her more neither, till I have got hundered thousand a year. Then I can love, and tell it and hope to be well received. Farewell, Dear Sir. Have you seen M. de Chester? Your humble servant.

" L'abbé Prévost <sup>2</sup>."

This is English, reasonably correct, even idiomatic, in struc-

1. So given by HARRISSE, p. 254, for " a great many. " As given in the *Œuvres de Voltaire*, ed. Garnier frères, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 467-68, it reads " at great many, " obviously a misprint.

2. HARRISSE, pp. 253-54. Also in Voltaire as noted. The text in Voltaire varies, not in the sense, but in spelling and minor details of the wording. Apparently it has been " corrected. "



ture <sup>1</sup>. A comparison with Voltaire's English letters is not perhaps altogether fair to the latter, since we have so many more of them, and therefore so many more chances of finding him in error. If, however, we can form a judgment on this one letter of Prévost's, it seems that his English is slightly more correct, but less forceful, than Voltaire's. Prévost says, for instance: "Every thing shall be kept in good order to return in your hands when *I'm* at Paris," using the present tense in the dependent clause with future meaning, as regularly in English; Voltaire writes after the more strictly logical French fashion: "The first letter *I shall receive* from you will be <sup>2</sup>." Voltaire offers a number of un-English constructions which are not paralleled in Prévost: "One obeys *to* the laws only and *to* one's whims <sup>3</sup>"; "very convenient for a print or *to* a medal <sup>4</sup>"; "I flatter myself... you will come to see the house I *build* <sup>5</sup>." Prévost has a double negative: "By no means you can't take ill," and also: "I wo'nt see her more neither," provided that, as seems probable, Harriette's text is correct. The other text reads: "By no means can you take it ill," which is probably "corrected." Prévost has also the French-sounding "best terms *of* the world," and the "most solitary place *of* the world." The prepositions, the foreigner's bugbear in other languages besides English, are, however, on the whole remarkably correct in Prévost's letter; Vol-

1. The variants in the text as given in the works of Voltaire are rather numerous. The following are the most important: "I am" regularly for "I'm"; "do not" for "don't"; "the Death of Julius Caesar" for "Julius Caesar's death"; "he has not spoken" for "he has not spoke"; "till the tenth of December" for "to the 10th. of december"; "whose" for "whoose"; "have advised" for "advised"; "love works" for "love-worcks"; "till" for "til"; "It is" for "T'is"; "not yet been printed" for "not been printed yet"; "Psyche" for "Phyché"; "think" for "thinck"; "will not see" for "wo'nt see"; "more till" for "more neither, till"; "hundred for" "hundered"; etc.

2. *Œuvres*, XXXIII, pp. 253-56.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 470.



taire<sup>1</sup> has a great deal more difficulty with them. It should be noted also that Prévost's letter was written in France and, more than that, while he was in retreat, which makes it almost certain that we possess an English letter in his own style and not one corrected by some English friend of his acquaintance.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRÉVOST AND VOLTAIRE'S *LETTRES PHILOSOPHIQUES*

It is hardly possible to treat Prévost's opinions of English literature without making frequent references to, or comparisons with, the *Lettres philosophiques* of Voltaire. So it seems especially desirable to begin this study of Prévost's criticism by noting what he himself said of Voltaire's work. His review of the Letters appeared six months before their publication in French and shortly after that of the 1733 English edition. Prévost had, however, as he himself tells us<sup>2</sup>, seen the French original, and in fact calls attention to certain mistakes in the English translation which appeared at London, August 14 or 16, 1733<sup>3</sup>. The first French edition, pirated by Jore, did not begin to circulate until about the middle of April, 1734<sup>4</sup>. Prévost's articles form part of Volume I of the *Pour et Contre*, Numbers XI, XII, and XIII. They appeared the latter part of September and the first part of October, 1733. Thus the first public appearance of the *Lettres philosophiques* in French<sup>5</sup>

1. Cf. L. Foulet, *Correspondance de Voltaire* (1726-1729), Paris, 1913 (pp. 53-54, p. 94, p. 103, p. 113, p. 136, p. 147, p. 158), for similar errors.

2. PC., I, 242.

3. Lanson, *Introduct.* to ed. of *Lettres phil.*, 1909, Vol. I, p. XL.

4. *Ibid.*

5. At least Prévost's is the first French review of Voltaire's Letters which M. Lanson (*op. cit.*, I, XLIV) considers important enough to be mentioned.

was probably in the form of the very full *compte rendu* by Prévost the month following the publication of the English edition<sup>1</sup>. So it is the more interesting to note his attitude.

After paying various compliments to Voltaire and mentioning the eagerness of the English public to read the Letters, Prévost calls attention to the translator's error in making Voltaire's reference to Luther and Calvin as authors "qu'on ne lit plus guères aujourd'hui" read, "que ce ne sont que de *misérables* auteurs (all of 'em wretched authors, p. 49)<sup>2</sup>." "Si l'on excepte quelques autres fautes de cette nature, la traduction de M. Lockman ne paroîtra guères inférieure à l'original<sup>3</sup>." Then follows a brief general indication of the content of the Letters, and after this is a significant passage:

"La lecture [des Lettres philosophiques] est amusante. Il y a de l'esprit, de l'agrément : mais qui s'attendroit à voir sortir rien de grossier de sa plume ? D'ailleurs, il est question de sçavoir si l'exactitude se trouve toujours dans les faits, la vérité dans les réflexions, la justice dans la critique, etc., enfin s'il n'y a pas dans quelques endroits de la distinction à faire entre le bel esprit, et l'écrivain juste et exact<sup>4</sup>."

This fair estimate and query may still hold to a great extent to-day. Prévost proceeds to make certain remarks which support his contention and give a truer and more exact idea of the Quakers, the state of commerce in England, etc. These show that he had obtained an accurate knowledge of the country and that he was interested in giving his countrymen a true account of conditions as he had found them. The pleasure of correcting Voltaire entered also no doubt into his reasons. As usual, he avoids carefully all discussion of politics or religion<sup>5</sup>, but promises a more complete treatment of the following letters, which deal with the safer field of literature.

1. Number XII is followed by : "Lu et approuvé, ce 22. Septembre 1733. Signé, Souchay." PC., I, 288.

2. PC., I, 242-43, and note (a).

3. *Ibid.*, 243.

4. *Ibid.*, 244-45.

5. *Ibid.*, 248.



He resumes first what Voltaire has to say about the life of Lord Bacon and repeats the anecdote which made Bolingbroke say of his enemy, Marlborough : " C'étoit un si grand homme que j'ai oublié tous ses vices. " Thus Voltaire, apropos of Bacon's having received bribes, and having been disgraced by Parliament. Prévost continues : " Ainsi l'estime extraordinaire des Anglois pour le Lord Bacon, ne leur permet plus de regarder en lui " que le père de la nouvelle philosophie, l'habile historien, le bel esprit, et l'élégant écrivain. " C'est lui qui a reconnu le premier tout ce qu'il y a de puéril dans la philosophie des Anciens, et qui a fait les premiers pas vers les connoissances solides par la voye des *expériences*. A la vérité l'on avoit fait avant lui des découvertes admirables ; mais on ne les avoit dues qu'au hazard. L'aiguille aimantée, l'imprimerie, l'art de graver sur le cuivre et de peindre à l'huile, les lunettes, la poudre à canon, étoient déjà des choses connues. On avoit même découvert un nouveau monde. Mais avec la connoissance de tant de merveilles, on n'étoit pas plus avancé dans celles de la nature. Un certain instinct mécanique avoit été le seul guide des hommes dans toutes ces recherches ; et c'est une chose fort remarquable, que les plus belles inventions soient venues des siècles les plus grossiers et les plus barbares. Bacon a commencé à mettre de l'ordre et de la clarté dans les connoissances physiques. Il a rectifié les découvertes précédentes, il en a fait de nouvelles, et il a ouvert le chemin à tout ce qu'il y a de bons physiciens après lui. Il s'en est peu fallu qu'il n'ait découvert la pesanteur de l'air. Il avoit déjà quelques conjectures de son élasticité. Mais ce qui doit être plus surprenant pour les Anglois, c'est " qu'on " trouve en termes exprès dans un endroit de ses ouvrages, le " nouveau système de l'attraction, dont ils attribuent l'honneur " à Sir Isaac Newton. " M... porte son jugement sur les autres ouvrages du Chancelier Bacon. Ses Essais de Morale sont fort estimables ; s'ils sont moins lus que les Maximes de la Rochefoucault et les Essais de Montagne, c'est uniquement parce qu'il est moins satyrique que le premier, et moins sceptique



que le second, quoique dans le fond beaucoup plus instructif. Pour ce qui regarde son Histoire d'Henri VII, il ne paroît pas que M... en ait une haute idée. Il s'offense même qu'on ait osé la comparer avec celle du Président de Thou, et il en cite quelques endroits qui ne sauroient soutenir en effet une si glorieuse comparaison <sup>1</sup>.

" Pour m'expliquer sans flatterie, cette douzième lettre est journée si agréablement, malgré le mélange sérieux d'un peu de philosophie, qu'elle fait quelque tort aux cinq suivantes. M..., en parlant de Locke et de Newton, veut absolument n'être que philosophe. Il entreprend d'exposer leurs systèmes; il les fait raisonner, il raisonne avec eux; il leur fait dire de fort bonnes choses, et il en dit lui-même qui le sont aussi; mais le beau sexe qui fait déjà la moitié du monde, et les trois quarts au moins de l'autre moitié, l'auroient volontiers dispensé de cet étalage de science philosophique. Ils auroient souhaité du moins qu'imitant certain *Enchanteur qui fait parler les morts et promène son lecteur si agréablement dans la lune*, il eût tempéré la sécheresse de sa matière par quelque fiction agréable, ou par quelque autre enfin de ces tours heureux, qui coûtent si peu à une belle imagination. Il se seroit fait lire avec autant d'utilité que d'agrément; au lieu que des sept huitièmes du monde dont j'ai parlé, à peine se trouvera-t-il quelqu'un qui ait soutenu une lecture si longue sans se faire à soi-même le tort de sauter quelques pages. Pour le dernier huitième, comme il est composé d'esprits profonds, bien instruits, et avec cela difficiles et un peu orgueilleux, ils ont lu; mais ils n'ont point paru contents qu'on ait entrepris d'expliquer la philosophie ancienne et moderne dans cinq petites Lettres, et ils prétendent que c'est manquer de respect pour des personnages tels que Newton, Descartes, Locke, etc., que de vouloir donner une *légère idée* de leurs profondes spéculations. Ainsi M... a trop fait pour les uns, et n'a point fait assez pour les autres <sup>2</sup>."

1. Particularly adapted to please Prévost as the translator of De Thou.

2. PC., I, 273-78.

In thus criticizing Voltaire for not following Fontenelle, Prévost was repeating, no doubt, what was frequently said by the London wiseacres of the time. The whole was reasonable enough certainly on the face of it, but the event proved that it was Prévost who was wrong, and not Voltaire <sup>1</sup>. We see also on the part of the former a strong desire to please the public of the salons, the same public to whom he addressed his novels and who must on no account be bored. However, Fontenelle's "marquise," though still existing, had made great strides in the period of nearly half a century which separated the *Entretiens* from the *Lettres*, and the mental pabulum did not need such a thick sugar-coating as Prévost thought.

"On oublie bientôt ce léger sujet de plainte, lorsqu'on est arrivé à la dix-huitième lettre, qui roule sur la tragédie. L'auteur est là sur son propre terrain. Il n'a besoin ni de fiction pour arrêter ses lecteurs, ni d'efforts pour leur plaire. Il s'explique sur le théâtre Anglois en artiste habile, qui par un long et heureux exercice de sa profession s'est acquis le droit de juger du travail des autres. Après avoir remarqué que les Anglois et les Espagnols ont eudes théâtres réglés (a) avant les François, il examine sur quoi la haute réputation de Shakespear est fondée. Ce poète tragique avoit reçu tout son mérite de la nature. Il ne paroît dans ses ouvrages (b) ni goût, ni connoissance des règles ; mais il s'y trouve par tout des étincelles du plus beau feu du monde. C'étoit une imagination naturellement sublime, qui n'ayant point d'autre guide qu'elle-même, s'est

1. Jordan wrote, in his *Histoire d'un voyage littéraire fait en 1733 en France, en Angleterre et en Hollande*, 1735, pp. 186-87: "Mr. de Voltaire m'écrivit sur ce sujet, et se plaint que Mr. Prévôt le traite un peu mal dans son *Pour et Contre*. Ce qui lui fait le plus de peine, c'est que Mr. Prévôt critique les endroits qui roulent sur *Lock* et *Newton*. "Ce Mr., dit-il, "voudroit que j'eusse imité la Pluralité des Mondes de Fontenelle, et que "j'eusse le ridicule de dire de jolies choses sur la règle de Kepler, et sur "la gravitation en raison inverse des quarrés de distance." Je trouve que Mr. de Voltaire a raison, et qu'il n'est pas naturel que dans des lettres, où l'on traite ordinairement les sujets avec plus de légèreté que dans les dissertations particulières, on examine à fond des matières de la philosophie la plus profonde, qui demandent, pour être éclaircies, des volumes, et des ouvrages faits *ex professo*."



égarée souvent dans sa route. M... entre dans le détail de ses défauts. Il n'en lui reproche point que les Anglois ne reconnoissent ; mais en confessant même que son exemple, ainsi que le remarque l'auteur, a fait tort à un grand nombre de poètes de sa nation qui l'ont imité trop servilement, ils ne conviennent point que la plupart de ses "saillies déréglées et de ses bizarres" (lettre XVIII, p. 167) imaginations aient acquis par la longueur du temps le droit de passer pour sublimes. "C'est une injure, disent-ils, que l'auteur fait à toute l'Angleterre. On y sçait distinguer ce qui est véritablement sublime d'avec ce qui ne l'est pas, et l'on n'y admire dans Shakespear que ce qui l'est effectivement <sup>1</sup>."

"(a) Shakespear et Lopez de Vega ont été comme les fondateurs du théâtre en Espagne et en Angleterre, l'un sous Philippe second, et l'autre sous Elizabeth <sup>2</sup>."

"(b) J'adoucis l'expression du traducteur; *not so much as a single spark of good taste*. Elle est outrée, et elle a choqué ici bien des gens."

Note that Prévost in the interest of accuracy characteristically softens the opinion that Shakespear was "sans la moindre étincelle de bon goût, et sans la moindre connoissance des règles," as Voltaire's text reads, and notice also that "il s'y trouve par tout des étincelles du plus beau feu du monde," and "c'étoit une imagination naturellement sublime, qui n'ayant point d'autre guide qu'elle-même s'est égarée souvent dans sa route," are not a close paraphrase of Voltaire at all, but the expression of Prévost's own admiration, strongly tempered nevertheless by the feeling that Shakespear would have gained much by being more regular <sup>3</sup>. It

1. PC., I, 278-79.

2. This also is taken from Voltaire, with the names of Elizabeth and Philip added by Prévost.

3. But Prévost does not acknowledge these as his own opinions. As he expresses them they might well be taken for Voltaire's. The "plus beau feu du monde" is perhaps a strengthening of such phrases of Voltaire as "un génie plein de force et de fécondité," and as "de si belles scènes, des morceaux si grands et si terribles répandus dans ses farces



should be noted that Prévost claims to be expressing only the more "enlightened" English opinion of the time, quite ready to admit often that Shakespear had fallen into "saillies déréglées et de bizarres imaginations," and that "taste" had made great strides since his time. For the most rabid expression of this attitude it is necessary to cite only Rymer<sup>1</sup>, who surpasses in fault-finding anything that Voltaire ever wrote. Perhaps it has not been enough emphasized that if the French critics of the time were too much given to seeing defects in Shakespear rather than beauties, they had every precedent in many of the foremost spokesmen of English contemporary criticism<sup>2</sup>.

Prévost continues: "M... pour faire mieux connoître en France le génie de Shakespear, a traduit en vers françois un des plus beaux endroits de ce poète. C'est le monologue de *Hamlet*, qui délibère s'il doit vivre ou se donner la mort... Il est certain qu'une si belle traduction fait naître une grande idée de l'original. Mais il me vient à l'esprit, pour mettre tout à fait le lecteur en état d'en juger, de joindre ici la traduction littérale du passage de Shakespear<sup>3</sup>.

"Être, ou n'être point, voilà de quoi il est question. Voyons quel est le plus glorieux, ou de souffrir les traits et les outrages de la mauvaise fortune, ou de s'armer contre une mer de troubles, et de les finir en s'y opposant. Mourir! Qu'est-ce donc que mourir? C'est dormir. C'est n'être plus. Et ce som-

monstrueuses, qu'on appelle tragédies." Note that Voltaire characteristically takes away with one hand what he has given with the other. "Une imagination naturellement sublime" is indeed based on the "génie plein... de naturel et de sublime," but the rest of the sentence is not found in Voltaire's Letters.

1. Says Rymer in an appreciative judgment of *Othello*: "There is in this Play some burlesk, some humour and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew and some Mimicry to divert the spectators; but the tragical part is plainly none other than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour." *Short View*, found in Spingarn, *Critical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 255.

2. These spokesmen were of course themselves much under French influence.

3. The *Bibliothèque britannique*, 1733-47, in the section for Oct.-Dec., 1733, reviewed the *Lettres philosophiques*.

Prévost's translation, undertaken in the interest of literalness, does of course represent Shakespear much better than Voltaire's<sup>1</sup>. While some parts might, it seems, be still closer to the original than they are, the improvement is nevertheless great, especially for the time<sup>2</sup>. One mistranslation should be pointed out. "To die; to sleep; No more" is made to read: "Mourir! Qu'est-ce donc que mourir? C'est dormir. C'est n'être plus," instead of "ce n'est rien de plus," or simply "rien de plus," as later in Voltaire's literal translation and in those of Le Tourneur and Hugo fils. The *Bibliothèque britannique*<sup>3</sup> rendered it correctly as "voilà tout." The translation, however, of the latter, taken as a whole, is much weaker than Prévost's. It abounds in paraphrases. The simple "être, ou n'être point" becomes "être, ou cesser d'être"; "une mer de troubles," which is almost a literal translation of Shakespear, appears as the all too *précieux* "un déluge de maux." Likewise Prévost's literal "de les finir [les maux] en s'y opposant" degenerates into "à les terminer en dépit de la fortune." Examples might be found throughout. The Le Tourneur and Hugo fils translations<sup>4</sup>, as is to be expected, are generally more literal than Prévost's. If some passages are better rendered, however, others are weaker. On the whole, neither is particularly to be preferred to the Abbé's in spite of the fact that his is the first of them all. Prévost is doing pioneer work, and his tendency is in the right direction, toward fidel-

1. In her study of *Pierre Le Tourneur*, Miss Mary Gertrude Cushing cites (p. 231) a literal translation by Voltaire of the Hamlet monologue as of the 1734 edition of the *Lettres phil.* The Kehl edition (1784-89) does in fact give such a version following the verse-translation mentioned above, but it was borrowed in this posthumous edition from the *Appel à toutes les Nations* of 1761, and never belonged to the *Lettres phil.* (Lanson, ed., 1909, Vol. II, p. 82, note to line 97). Miss Cushing of course was without the benefit of M. Lanson's later study.

2. Cf., for instance, the rendering of the *Bibliothèque britannique* of the same year.

3. *Bibliothèque britannique*, II, 123.

4. Given by Miss Cushing, pp. 232-35. For Hugo fils's translation, see also François-Victor Hugo, *Œuvres complètes de W. Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., 1875-81, Vol. 10, pp. 86-87.



ity to the original. He is really surpassed only by Voltaire in his 1761 version, which is in fact remarkable for its literalness and vigor and shows what he was able to do when he chose, though he seems to have given it unwillingly under the pressure of such comments as those of Prévost and of the *Bibliothèque britannique*<sup>1</sup>.

In Prévost's criticism the authority given to Shaftesbury should be noticed; it will be considered more in detail later.

"Revenons. M. . . ajoute au caractère de Shakespear, celui de Dryden, et traduit aussi un des plus beaux endroits de ses pièces de théâtre. Ce poète tragique auroit pu se rendre beaucoup plus digne de sa haute réputation, s'il eût été plus sensible à la gloire d'être exact, qu'à celle de paroître universel, et de composer avec une extrême facilité. Mais il semble à M. . . que la nature n'a point formé les Anglois (a) pour produire des beautés régulières. Leur imagination languit, dès qu'elle cesse d'être libre. La tragédie même de Caton, qui est d'ailleurs un chef-d'œuvre, ne se soutient point dans toutes ses parties, par la seule raison peut-être que l'auteur a pris trop de soin pour la rendre conforme aux règles. Ajoutez que l'intrigue amoureuse est très mal imaginée, ce qui répand beaucoup de langueur dans toute la pièce. M. . . observe que la coutume d'introduire l'amour " dans les pièces de théâtre " passa de Paris à Londres vers l'an 1660 avec nos rubans et " nos perruques. On a eu dessein, dit-il, de plaire aux dames " par ce changement<sup>2</sup>. "

"(a) Mylord Shaftsbury, qui semble avoir connu mieux que personne le génie de sa nation, est d'un sentiment tout opposé. En convenant que les tragédies angloises sont fort éloignées de la perfection, il n'attribue point le mal à d'autre cause qu'à la négligence

1. After translating the Hamlet monologue " aussi littéralement que nous le pourrons sans être absolument barbares ou inintelligibles, " the *Bibliothèque britannique* remarks: " Voilà à peu près ce que dit Shakespear; voici ce que Mr. de Voltaire lui fait dire. " II, p. 124.

2. The Abbé Du Bos in 1719 had devoted several chapters to the *abuse* of the love motif. *Réflexions sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 6th ed., 1755, Vol. I, pp. 130-54.



des Anglois, dont la source, dit-il, est leur vanité. Ils reconnoissent, ajoute-t-il, en quoi ils manquent; ils ne veulent point prendre la peine qu'il faut pour être plus exacts. *Miscellaneous Reflexions*, pp. 258-59<sup>1</sup>. "

Again the prestige of Shaftesbury. Notice a disposition on the part of Prévost to depict the English, not as a people with a fundamentally different conception of literary art from that of the French, but simply as "knowing the better" — which was French — "and choosing the worse" — which was English. This is partly policy, no doubt, but it is also, as the citing of Shaftesbury shows, in the English thought of the time as well. Prévost is inclined, not indeed to reject the strong feeling noticed in the chapters on the general principles of his criticism, that English taste was very different from French and yet still worthy of study, but to emphasize as far as possible the general tendency of the English at this period to approach the French viewpoint. In this he was certainly far more conservative than has usually been supposed, but for that very reason his influence upon his countrymen may have been all the greater.

Notice that Prévost's paraphrasing of Voltaire omits from "la coutume d'introduire l'amour dans les pièces de théâtre" the words "à tort et à travers" after *amour*. Whether this was an intentional omission or a defect in the text used by Prévost we do not know.

"La dix-neuvième Lettre n'est pas moins curieuse que la précédente. L'auteur y donne une idée des plus avantageuses de la comédie angloise. Wicherley, Sir John Vanbrug, Congreve, Sir Richard Steele, M. Ciber, etc., sont des auteurs excellens quoique différens chacun dans leur génie. Les pièces de Congreve sont les plus ingénieuses et les plus régulières. Celles de Vanbrug sont plus enjouées. Celles de Wicherley ont plus de force et de feu. En général les Anglois excellent à peindre le ridicule des mœurs. Quoique ces éloges n'aient pu

1. PC., I, 284-85, and note (a).

manquer de les flatter, ils n'ont pas lu avec plaisir la réflexion suivante. Congreve, dit M..., donne à ses personnages le langage qui convient à des gens d'honneur, mais il les fait agir comme des coquins ; preuve qu'il connoissoit parfaitement la nature humaine, et qu'il fréquentoit ce qu'on appelle le monde poli. Ce trait de satire est suivi du récit d'une visite que l'auteur rendoit un jour à M. Congreve <sup>1</sup>, "etc. The well known story follows.

It is probably significant that Prévost expresses no personal opinion regarding the Restoration dramatists. At any rate it is a silence he observes in the main throughout the *Pour et Contre*. He was doubtless repelled by the extreme grossness of the theater at that period. In his novels he avoids with the utmost care any form of expression that might offend against delicacy.

Prévost shortly returns to a consideration of the rest of Voltaire's Letters <sup>2</sup>, but his originality here is slight, and he very nearly limits himself to summarizing Voltaire. Letter XX he criticizes unfavorably. "Elle est d'une sécheresse qui répond mal à son titre, et je suis trompé si les deux pages dont elle est composée, n'ont été faites uniquement pour avoir occasion de placer une petite pièce de vers qui se trouve à la fin <sup>3</sup>." The next letter is judged favorably, though Prévost thinks that more should have been said about the literary gifts of Rochester, especially after the author had observed at the very beginning that "Saint-Evremond n'a fait connoître dans Mylord Rochester que l'homme de plaisirs, et qu'il se propose de faire connoître en lui l'homme de génie et grand poète <sup>4</sup>." Then he summarizes Voltaire's account of Waller, but is in error or else using an incorrect text when he makes Voltaire say that "L'indolence ou l'orgueil le fit renoncer à l'exercice des talens qu'il avoit reçus de la nature." In fact Voltaire's

1. PC., I, 285-86.

2. *Ibid.*, 297-308.

3. *Ibid.*, 297.

4. *Ibid.*, 298.



letter actually says just the opposite: "Waller . . . n'eut jamais ni le sot orgueil ni la nonchalance d'abandonner son talent," doubtless reminiscent of the famous Congreve story already alluded to. "M. Pope, M. Prior, Butler, le Docteur Swift, reçoivent de justes éloges dans la lettre 22<sup>e</sup> 1," says the author of the *Pour et Contre*. He thinks Voltaire's translation of one of the "plus beaux endroits" of the Rape of the Lock "fort supérieure à l'original 2." He objects with much justice to Voltaire's statement that "la délicatesse, le choix, la justesse, le bon goût, se trouvent réunis dans toutes les productions de M. Swift. En vers comme en prose, il est toujours dans les bornes de la raillerie la plus fine, la plus délicate et la plus polie." Prévost corrects: "S'il y a quelque chose à redire à cet éloge, c'est qu'il est un peu trop général: car de l'aveu même des Anglois, il y a quantité de plaisanteries dans les ouvrages de Swift, qui sont basses et indécentes. Son projet de tuer les enfants pour les manger, quand on en a plus qu'on n'en peut nourrir; certaines idées badines qui roulent sur des matières sales et dégoûtantes, etc., tout cela me paraît peu propre à flatter le goût des honnêtes gens 3." This criticism is accurate in its general tendency. It is much nearer the truth than Voltaire's. We are surprised at Prévost's attitude toward Swift's bitterly satirical proposal that the poverty of the Irish should be relieved by the sale of their children as food for the rich 4. He treats it apparently as nothing more than a sorry jest instead of as a sledge-hammer blow at English tyranny. His preoccupation with the "style noble" and with the delicate sensibilities of "les honnêtes gens" is especially to be noted and should serve as a still further re-

1. PC., I, 299.

2. *Ibid.*, 299.

3. *Ibid.*, 300; 300-01, note (a).

4. "A modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or the country, and for making them beneficial to the public" (published in 1729 while P. was in England).



striction upon the largeness of view generally attributed to him<sup>1</sup>.

Prévost goes on to summarize Voltaire. The lack of good historians is attributed to the violent party spirit in England.

"Ils n'ont point de véritables tragédies ; ils ont plusieurs comédies admirables ; il se trouve dans quelques-uns de leurs poèmes des passages d'une beauté surprenante ; leurs philosophes sont dignes de servir de précepteurs à tout le genre humain ; tel est le jugement qu'on peut porter en général des ouvrages et du génie des Anglois<sup>2</sup>" ; thus Voltaire's compact summation of English defects and merits quoted months before the actual publication of his *Lettres* in French. Prévost discusses the letter on the rewards given to literary men and to great men in general ; that on the Royal Society and on the French Academy is regarded "comme une des meilleures parties de son ouvrage<sup>3</sup>." In connection with the project for forming an English Academy, Prior is mentioned and compared, after Voltaire, to La Fontaine ; Pope in the same way is the Boileau of England, and Congreve is the Molière<sup>4</sup>. In concluding, Prévost says :

"Comme mon dessein n'est pas de traduire les Lettres de M. . . et que je n'ai eu que deux vues dans cet extrait ; l'une, de faire connoître en partie l'ouvrage ; l'autre, d'en emprunter quelques traits agréables pour l'ornement de cette feuille ; je n'abuserai point du droit que l'impression donne sur un livre. Ce que j'ai tiré du sien se fera goûter sans doute, et répondra ainsi aux deux buts que je me suis proposez. Il y reste d'ailleurs mille beautés auxquelles je n'ai pas touché. Je n'ai épuisé ni les louanges, ni la critique<sup>5</sup>."

1. As is natural, Prévost's largeness of view is much greater in theory than in practice. His intelligence acknowledges that French rules are not absolute nor universal in their application, but unconsciously his instincts — French by education and environment — revolt against the esthetic canons admitted in principle.

2. PC., I, 304.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-08.

It seems nevertheless that Prévost has come dangerously near infringing upon the author's rights, for, excluding the parts that might have provoked political or religious controversy, he has resumed him about as fully as he could without actually translating the whole.

If we consider the sum total of Prévost's criticism of the *Lettres philosophiques*, we see that his remarks are usually in the direction of greater truth and of less extreme judgments. It is important to notice that the *Lettres philosophiques* were not only thus summarized six months before the appearance of a French edition, but that their pronouncements on English literature were carefully scrutinized and toned down by one whose views were less warped by violent prejudices and who thus, with all the reserves that I believe it necessary to make, did certainly come nearer to giving a fair estimate of English literature than did Voltaire<sup>1</sup>. Apart from inherent differences of mind and temperament, this is perhaps due to the fact that Prévost in England mingled more with the people of average culture, while Voltaire was associated with aristocratic and court circles, precisely the part of English society which at that time was as near French in taste as people of another nationality well could be. The influence of Prévost's articles was, however, beyond all denial greatly lessened by his refusal to discuss religion or politics. Philosophy and government were still the chief subjects of interest which the French found in England. Her literature was as yet subordinate. Let us not fail to note nevertheless that Prévost was reacting against this general tendency and thus from the very first preparing the current which in the second half of the century swept more and more toward English literature and gave it at least an equal place beside English philosophy and political institutions.

1. Cf. *infra*, pp. 62-64.



## CHAPTER VII

PRÉVOST AND SHAKESPEAR <sup>1</sup>

In Prévost's treatment of Shakespear we have one of the most important parts of his literary criticism and one of the most interesting. Shakespear, as the greatest of English authors and at the same time the most different from those sanctioned by the standards of French classical taste, may be taken almost as the supreme test of the degree of the foreigner's appreciation of English literature. So he has often been taken. So he has been invoked as proof of Prévost's enlightened appreciation of the literature of England. Over Shakespear, war was waged most hotly in France during the last two-thirds of the eighteenth century. It is important, as well as interesting, to examine Prévost's attitude toward the English dramatist. It is worth while to determine how far we may accept as true the conventional opinion that Prévost alone of his French contemporaries entered into the spirit of the king of the English theater and held for him unqualified admiration.

We need not here detail M. Jusserand's work <sup>2</sup>, and relate how the name of Shakespear is found in the inventory of Fouquet's books in 1665, in Boyer's Grammar in 1700, in the *Journal des Savants* in 1708, or, treated with more detail, in the *Journal littéraire de la Haye* for 1717. All these but show the gradual setting of the current toward interest in the English author and prove, if proof were necessary, that he did not in one moment spring forth into the light thanks to the pen of Voltaire.

Muralt, who, it will be remembered, was in England dur-

1. For a more detailed study of this question, cf. my article: "The Abbé Prévost and Shakespear," *Modern Philology*, XVII (1919), pp. 177-98.

2. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*.



ing 1694 or 1695, but whose Letters were not published till 1725, mentioned Shakespear, but greatly preferred Jonson, and contented himself with the casual remark : " L'Angleterre est un païs de passions et de catastrophes, jusques-là que Schakspear, un de leurs meilleurs anciens poètes, a mis une grande partie de leur histoire en tragédies <sup>1</sup>. "

Voltaire's attitude toward Shakespear we have already seen, so far as the *Lettres philosophiques* are concerned. There are two anterior works which show a somewhat more favorable viewpoint, the *Discours sur la tragédie* prefixed to *Brutus* and printed in 1731, and the French version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, intended as an advance defense of the *Henriade*, and published in 1733. In the first, Voltaire writes in closing : " Peut-être les Français ne souffriraient pas que l'on fit paraître sur leurs théâtres un chœur composé d'artisans et de plébéiens romains ; que le corps sanglant de César y fût exposé aux yeux du peuple, et qu'on excitât ce peuple à la vengeance, du haut de la tribune aux harangues : c'est à la coutume, qui est la reine de ce monde, à changer le goût des nations, et à tourner en plaisir les objets de notre aversion <sup>2</sup>. " Here, even taking into account the fact that he is preparing the public for his own innovations, we have what is really a quite fair and broad-minded attitude. Voltaire is sincere in his admiration, even though he does have an ulterior motive. The proof lies in his desire to imitate those things in English drama which had impressed him so strongly. The closing phrases about changing the taste of a nation are in much the same spirit as those later words of Prévost : " Tout ce qui peut servir à l'histoire du goût dans les différens siècles, est extrêmement propre à régler le nôtre <sup>3</sup>. " For the moment Voltaire also is ready to admit that French taste has not reached the limit of perfectibility.

1. Bénédict Louis de Muralt, *Lettres sur les Anglois*, etc., second edition, Cologne, 1727, p. 34.

2. *Œuvres*, II, pp. 316-18.

3. PC., XIV, 356.

The second work mentioned, the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, appeared first in English at the end of 1727 without comment on Shakespear. The French version of 1733 was not simply a translation, but a reworking and an enlargement of the theme. In the course of his remarks on Homer, Voltaire inserted an incidental passage on Shakespear, which reads in part as follows: "Quand je commençai à apprendre la langue anglaise, je ne pouvais comprendre comment une nation si éclairée pouvait admirer un auteur si extravagant; mais dès que j'eus une plus grande connaissance de la langue, je m'aperçus que les Anglais avaient raison, et qu'il est impossible que toute une nation se trompe en fait de sentiment, et ait tort d'avoir du plaisir. Ils voyaient comme moi les fautes grossières de leur auteur favori; mais ils sentaient mieux que moi ses beautés, d'autant plus singulières que ce sont des éclairs qui ont brillé dans la nuit la plus profonde." Then follow these words, which are the high water mark of Voltaire's appreciation of Shakespear: "Tel est le privilège du génie d'invention: il se fait une route où personne n'a marché avant lui; il court sans guide, sans art, sans règle; il s'égare dans sa carrière, mais il laisse loin derrière lui tout ce qui n'est que raison et qu'exactitude<sup>1</sup>."

Even taking into account Voltaire's own grave restrictions on his admiration, we should not fail to recognize here real appreciation and a full acknowledgment of the primal rights of genius. Perhaps, in the estimating of Voltaire's critical attitude, there has been an over-tendency to emphasize his later narrow views, warped as they seemed to be by professional jealousy. Lounsbury has dealt somewhat harshly with him, and more stress might surely with justice be laid upon the substantial accord existing between Voltaire's viewpoint and that of such influential and intelligent Englishmen as Bolingbroke and Shaftesbury. It was not Voltaire's intelligence which was at fault in preventing his later judgments from being equal-

1. *Œuvres*, VIII, pp. 317-18.



ly fair and sound, but his disposition and character. Let us not confuse the two. To expect more favorable criticism than this just quoted, given the conditions (a Frenchman brought up exclusively on classical drama and confirmed in his tastes by an unenlightened English attitude) would surely be unfair. Indeed we shall be fortunate if we see this criticism of Voltaire's equalled for a long time after him.

In 1738 Louis Riccoboni, the famous Lelio of the *Comédie Italienne*, who had been in England at the same time as Voltaire and like him had talked with Congreve<sup>1</sup>, published his *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe*, in which he says that "Guillaume Shaskpear ayant consumé son patrimoine, entreprit le métier de voleur<sup>2</sup>". He sums up, however, more accurately. "S'il étoit permis," he says, "de s'écarter de ces règles, que la raison même a dictées, le théâtre anglois seroit en état de balancer la réputation des théâtres anciens et modernes : les beautés des tragédies angloises sont au-dessus de toutes les beautés que les théâtres de l'Europe peuvent nous montrer ; et si quelque jour les poètes anglois se soumettent aux trois unités du théâtre, et s'ils ne présentent pas le sang et les meurtres aux yeux des spectateurs, ils partageront, pour le moins, la gloire dont jouissent les meilleurs de nos théâtres modernes<sup>3</sup>." These are strong words and indicate great admiration. "The beauties of English tragedies surpass all the beauties which European drama can offer."

Thus briefly may we resume the state of critical opinion in France regarding Shakespear up to the year 1738. Little even of this knowledge could be said to extend to the public at large. Prévost was not, however, alone interested in the English dramatist nor was he the only writer who admired Shakéspear's genius, even while deploring his "faults."

1. Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques*, etc., 1740 ed., Amsterdam, p. 133.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 124 ff.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.



As for the Abbé Prévost himself, what is the opinion of modern critics regarding his attitude toward Shakespear?

"Cet abbé," writes M. Jusserand<sup>1</sup>, "était hérétique dans l'âme; il s'exprime sans respect sur les anciens et sur les règles; et il le fait, ce qui était alors sans exemple, au profit de l'auteur d'*Hamlet*." "Prévost," says Joseph Texte, "forcé de vivre en Angleterre, et d'y gagner sa vie, s'y anglicisa plus qu'aucun autre écrivain du dix-huitième siècle<sup>2</sup>." Faguet says: "Prévost est entièrement favorable à Shakespear... Sa critique est singulièrement juste<sup>3</sup>." M. Baldensperger remarks that "dans le *Pour et Contre*, en 1738, Prévost... félicite le poète [Shakespear] — dont il donnera jusqu'à une biographie circonstanciée — de n'avoir pas connu les Anciens... *Hamlet*, — comparé à *Électre*, — la *Tempête*, les *Joyeuses Commères*, *Othello*, sont l'objet spécial d'un examen sympathique... Prévost donne à son anglomanie sa libre expression<sup>4</sup>." M. Schröder thinks that "Prévost comprend mieux que Voltaire les audacieuses envolées de Shakespear... Par l'intelligence qu'il a eue de la plupart des beautés shakespeariennes, Prévost a singulièrement devancé les Français de son temps<sup>5</sup>." It has thus become customary to remark that, while Voltaire shows only a rather narrow and timid admiration for Shakespear, Prévost sets scarcely any limit to his enthusiasm and carries it even to the extreme of a veritable Anglomania. However, M. Schröder himself later brings forward a modification of his own previous opinion, though he does not explain the reasons for his change of heart. This is what he says: "Shakespear lui inspire [à Prévost], comme à Voltaire, une antipathie mêlée d'admiration. Il s'incline devant la vigueur de ses peintures, la saisissante

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

2. Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire*, p. 54.

3. Faguet, "Shakespeare," *Propos de théâtre*, p. 67.

4. Baldensperger, "Esquisse d'une histoire de Shakespeare en France," *Études d'histoire littéraire* (2<sup>e</sup> série, 1910), pp. 159-60.

5. V. Schröder, *l'Abbé Prévost*, p. 44.

beauté de ses sujets, il comprend même la philosophie profonde qui anime ses drames, il concède qu'ils font penser, mais les intrigues touffues, mais le mélange presque constant du tragique et du comique devait le choquer et le déconcerter <sup>1</sup>."

In the face of the unanimity with which critics have singled out Prévost for the distinction of being, as regards his appreciation of Shakespear, the most forward-looking man of his time, it is of special interest to note that the abundant and accurate details given in the *Pour et Contre* with regard to the life of Shakespear, the very favorable judgments cited by M. Jusserand <sup>2</sup> and by M. Baldensperger <sup>3</sup>, the information about the *Winter's Tale*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King John*, *Richard III*, *Henry VI*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and finally the comparison between Shakespear and Ben Jonson, all this is nothing but "la traduction de certains fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois <sup>4</sup>." Thus we have here only the opinion of an English admirer of Shakespear, and not the expression of Prévost's own opinions. In fact, after this long article on Shakespear, Prévost is already thinking of bringing forward a "correction." He says:

"Avant que de hasarder mes propres réflexions sur le caractère et le mérite de Shakespear, je me rends aux instances de quelques amateurs du Parnasse anglois, qui brûlant de connoître ce poète célèbre autrement que par des observations générales sur sa personne et sur ses écrits, me pressent de publier le sujet de quelques-unes de ses meilleures pièces. Je ne regrette point le tems que ce dessein m'a fait mettre à les relire <sup>5</sup>."

Prévost was entirely correct in calling No. CXCIV of the *Pour et Contre* a translation from the English, for it is possible to locate the original source. In his study of Shakespear,

1. V. Schroeder, "l'Abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1914), pp. 136-37.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 173.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. PC., XIV, 25.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 49.



Prévost used Rowe's edition, probably the second, which appeared in 1714, and which the Abbé called "la plus répandue". From this edition, or from the first of 1709-10, he obtained his information and the greater part of his opinions. It is this work which contains the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," translated by the editor of the *Pour et Contre*, Prévost.

This edition offered three different sources of information with regard to Shakespear: Rowe's essay entitled "Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespear", Gildon's "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England", and finally his "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear". The first essay, the one written by Rowe, is the source of the "fragmens de l'histoire littéraire des Anglois," that is to say, the source of that number of the *Pour et Contre* so often invoked as proof of the breadth of view, even of the Anglomania, of Prévost. At the end of this same number a short passage (pp. 47-48) is indicated by Prévost himself as being taken from Gildon's first essay, though Prévost gives only the title and not the author's name. The "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear" were of great help to Prévost in the preparation of the following number, the last of the two which were specially devoted to Shakespear. Even there, where we do find some of Prévost's own opinions, the plot analyses are translated from Gildon.

To sum up the results of a detailed study of these two numbers of the *Pour et Contre*, we find that the originality of Prévost in this criticism on Shakespear, enthusiastically praised as it has been, seems of the slightest: in one whole number the Abbé openly limits himself to giving only the *English* point of view — and this, once it is examined, proves to be almost

1. PC., XIV, p. 50.

2. Nicholas Rowe, *Shakespear's Works* (1709), I, pp. i-xl.

3. Rowe, *op. cit.*, VII (1710), pp. i-lxvii.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-444.

5. PC., XIV, p. 47, note (a).



wholly that of Rowe; in the second number he is almost always very near to Gildon in thought if not in language. On *Hamlet* the Abbé has nothing of value, and the little he does say is entirely in the spirit of his contemporaries, Voltaire included. *The Tempest* does not please him. *Othello* is criticized in the conventional way, although Prévost does go so far as to admit that the play was successful in spite of the rules, comparing it in this regard with the *Cid*; this perhaps is a discreet suggestion of a liking for *Othello*, but we cannot be sure. In any case, Prévost figures as but a timid advocate rather than as an "Anglomaniac" or as an enthusiastic "champion." Only the *Merry Wives* seems to evoke a really personal admiration, but even that is expressed in the vaguest and most general terms.

Prévost's position is midway between that of the more enthusiastic among the English and that of the hostile French. In all essential matters he is not far from the feeling of Gildon, more reserved than Rowe. Gildon thought that "Shakespear is indeed stor'd with a great many beauties, but they are in a heap of rubbish<sup>1</sup>." Prévost appears sometimes timid and hesitating in his opinions. Those which he acknowledges as his own show that he was much less in advance of the spirit of his time than has been thought. He remains, in short, very much an eighteenth-century Frenchman in his taste, very much a classicist. Occasionally, however, this classicism seems to tend cautiously toward greater liberality of viewpoint. The information that he gave — no less valuable because it was translated — and his moderation were of real service to the cause of Shakespear in France. For that he should receive his due meed of praise. Finally, it should be remembered that he was always a journalist, not a scholar, that he was obliged to write rapidly in order to live, and should be judged accordingly.

1. Gildon, *Remarks*, p. 425.

## CHAPTER VIII

## PRÉVOST AND ADDISON

Throughout the *Pour et Contre*, Addison (usually written, probably as an indication of pronunciation, "Addisson") is frequently mentioned. The attitude of the French critic is the one to be expected, considering the wide popularity which Addison had enjoyed in France for nearly twenty years <sup>1</sup>. Prévost refers to him as "le sage Addisson <sup>2</sup>," "le célèbre auteur du Spectateur <sup>3</sup>," "l'illustre Anglois <sup>4</sup>," "ce grand homme <sup>5</sup>," "l'incomparable Addisson <sup>6</sup>," "le sage et judicieux Addisson <sup>7</sup>," "l'illustre Addisson <sup>8</sup>," etc.: all of which indeed is hardly literary criticism but only the expression of the common attitude. Addison is frequently cited in one connection or another, his opinion being regarded of course as authoritative <sup>9</sup>. A case in point is a reference to Dryden's *All for Love* as "une des meilleures pièces de Dryden," and in the notes: "Au jugement de M. Addisson; et c'est tout dire <sup>10</sup>." Addison is likewise invoked in support of the statement that the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was the cause of the introduction into English poetry of an "elegance" and

1. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, p. 23, speaks of the vogue of the *Spectator* in France. Before 1728 there were at least eight editions of the 1716 translation.

2. PC., XVI, 30.

3. *Ibid.*, XV, 204.

4. *Ibid.*, XII, 4.

5. *Ibid.*, I, 47.

6. *Ibid.*, IX, 115.

7. *Ibid.*, II, 68.

8. *Ibid.*, XI, 86.

9. The Abbé du Bos as early as 1719 cites Addison frequently. So does the Abbé Le Blanc in his *Lettres d'un François* (1745). Telleen observes (pp. 24-25): "On peut presque avancer qu'Addison était un critique français. Ses jugements étaient acceptés hors de sa patrie."

10. PC., VII, 122.



a "charm" previously non-existent <sup>1</sup>, and Prévost cites some verses by Lord Chesterfield in support of the contention <sup>2</sup>. The opinion does little honor to Prévost's judgment, but he will do better later. In one place he speaks of the respect of the English for Addison as being "affoibli <sup>3</sup>," but it is evidently only a passing shadow, for he does not refer to it again nor does his own tone change later.

The references to the Spectator are brief. The work was too well known to need discussion. The Sir Roger de Coverly series is called Addison's favorite production and the anecdote is related of the reasons that led the author to bring it to an end with the narrative of the baronet's death <sup>4</sup>. In fact Addison did not want a reworking of his favorite character by an inferior hand and took this effective precaution to prevent it. The fundamental moral purpose of the Spectator is implied as follows: "C'étoit une fort bonne méthode que celle d'Addison pour déraciner les mauvais usages et les modes extravagantes. Il les représentoit sous toutes les faces qui pouvoient en faire apercevoir le ridicule <sup>5</sup>." Another passage speaks of Addison as the "ennemi du vice <sup>6</sup>."

An interesting comment in the light of a reference of Prévost's to Montaigne already noted <sup>7</sup> is the following: "Il est certain, comme Addison l'observe dans un de ses plus beaux Spectateurs, qu'il y a plus de plaisir à tirer de l'imagination que de l'entendement <sup>8</sup>." With this dictum in mind we are sure that Prévost means to be rather independent of the French rules.

It was to be expected that a Frenchman would like a drama so classical in form as Addison's Cato <sup>9</sup>. Prévost does, and in

1. PC., I, 239.

2. *Ibid.*, I, 264.

3. *Ibid.*, IX, 117 margin.

4. *Ibid.*, I, 47-48.

5. *Ibid.*, XIV, 337.

6. *Ibid.*, XI, 86.

7. *Supra*, pp. 36-37.

8. PC., XX, 317.

9. So Le Blanc wrote (Vol. III, p. 131): "Vous connoissez, Monsieur,



fact he refers to it as "une des plus belles tragédies angloises <sup>1</sup>." He is much less Voltairian in his taste, however, when he mentions with approval the line, "Eternity, thou pleasing dreadful thought<sup>2</sup>," and when he selects for translation the following:

Through what new scenes and changes must we pass?  
The wide, th'unbounded prospect lies before us,  
But clouds, shadows, and darkness rest upon it.  
Here will I hold; if there is a power above us,  
(And that there is all Nature cries aloud  
Through all her works) He must delight in virtue;  
And that which he delights in, must be happy <sup>3</sup>.

This is not a typically French eighteenth-century attitude, although it is not entirely absent from the French spirit in general.

Addison's Remarks on Italy come in for rather judicious praise, though somewhat greater than would be given now. The estimate besides is not given as Prévost's own but is quoted from the *Voyages de M. de Breval*. However, Prévost tacitly accepts the judgment. Of Addison's classical allusions Breval says: "Il y a rapporté avec autant d'érudition que d'élégance, toutes les connoissances qu'il avoit puisées dans la lecture des Anciens, et surtout dans celle des auteurs classiques <sup>4</sup>." The remark is especially accurate, the parts where Addison's wanderings led him directly on the path of classical literature being by all odds the best, though his method is very much out of date now.

le Caton de M. Addison, une des tragédies qui fait le plus d'honneur au théâtre anglois." Voltaire, addressing Bolingbroke in the *Discours sur la tragédie* (*Œuvres*, II, p. 322), calls it "cette tragédie, la seule bien écrite d'un bout à l'autre chez votre nation, à ce que je vous ai entendu dire à vous-même," and in the *Lettres philosophiques* (Vol. II, p. 85) he says that "le Caton de Mr. Adisson me paroît le plus beau personnage qui soit sur aucun théâtre," and (pp. 84-85) calls the author "le premier Anglais qui ait fait une pièce raisonnable et écrite d'un bout à l'autre avec élégance."

1. PC., VII, 60.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 356, note (a).

3. *Ibid.*, VII, 60, note (a).

4. *Ibid.*, XVI, 252.

Naturally the Campaign, the poem which first secured Addison his fame, is given special mention. The famous comparison of Marlborough to an Angel of the Lord is translated by Prévost and approved by him as "effectivement nouvelle, et d'un tour fort heureux <sup>1</sup>," and he adds in a note: "M. Addison réussit presque toujours heureusement dans ces sortes de figures. En voici une autre qu'on admire beaucoup dans sa belle tragédie de Caton. Sempronius témoigne à Porcius qu'il seroit au comble du bonheur, s'il pouvoit obtenir en mariage sa sœur Marcia: "Hélas Sempronius! lui dit l'autre, peux-tu penser parler d'amour à Marcia, tandis que la vie de son père est en danger? Il vaudroit autant caresser une Vestale tremblante, lorsqu'elle voit le feu sacré prêt d'expirer <sup>2</sup>."

It seems that Prévost is attracted by the element of boldness and originality in the two figures. He is evidently not in any way alarmed by them as a more conservative Frenchman might have been. The second is nearer classic taste than the other and might have been accepted by a Frenchman of the seventeenth century, but the first would have been condemned by Boileau as a literary ornament taken from Christianity. Such observations as Prévost makes on Addison are much more concrete and definite than the few generalities he permits himself on Shakespear. The fact is probably indicative of greater familiarity with and liking for the more classical author.

## CHAPTER IX

### PRÉVOST AND DRYDEN

In his Letter on Tragedy, Voltaire wrote: "Voici encore un passage d'un fameux tragique anglais, Dryden poète du tems de Charles Second, auteur plus fécond que judicieux,

1. PC., I, 341.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-43, note (a).



qui auroit une réputation sans mélange, s'il n'avoit fait que la dixième partie de ses ouvrages, et dont le grand défaut est d'avoir voulu être universel <sup>1</sup>. " There follows a translation of a short passage from *Aureng Zeb*, Act IV, scene 1. As criticism, all this is anything but specific, which of course was to be expected in a work where brevity was so essential. In the first volume of the *Pour et Contre*, as we have already seen, Prévost resumes Voltaire's estimate, but without comment so far as Dryden is concerned<sup>2</sup>. Later, however, he gives considerable space to the English poet.

One of the experiments Prévost tried for a time in his *Pour et Contre* was to put some of his literary opinions into the mouths of two characters imagined for the purpose. Here probably we see the influence of the *Spectator*. One of these characters was an "ancien avocat du Temple Bar" particularly favorable to French literature; the other was a young English "ministre" whose leanings were decidedly toward the authors of his own country. In this way Prévost hoped to vary his method with success and at the same time to insure the giving of due space to both the "Pour" and the "Contre." But apparently he soon tired of it. At any rate the expedient was abandoned after a few numbers.

One of the first authors to be treated in this way was Dryden. It is the Minister who speaks and Prévost later accepts his opinions as his own. After referring to Dryden's "belle tragédie de *Cléopâtre*," he continues: "Toute l'Angleterre couroit aux représentations de la pièce de Dryden, et depuis Shakespear on n'avoit point vu d'exemple d'un succès si brillant. En effet, mille beautés qui sont répandues dans cette tragédie doivent la faire regarder comme un chef-d'œuvre. Elle plairoit même sur les théâtres de France<sup>3</sup>, puisqu'avec toutes les perfections

1. *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 83.

2. PC., I, 284.

3. The Abbé Le Blanc wrote (Vol. III, pp. 151-52, note m): "*Tout pour l'amour ou le Monde bien perdu*... est de tous les ouvrages dramatiques de ce poète, celui où il a mis le plus d'art, et c'est une des

que les Français recherchent, elle n'a pas certains ornemens de notre usage qu'ils appellent des défauts, quoique nous soyons bien éloignés de leur donner le même nom. Quelques François qui se trouvoient à Londres entreprirent, avec une connoissance fort médiocre de notre langue, de faire la critique d'un ouvrage si applaudi. Leur censure tomboit particulièrement sur une des scènes dont le poète avoit recueilli le plus de gloire. Marc Antoine s'étant retiré à Alexandrie après la bataille d'Actium, Dryden feint qu'Octavie son épouse va le trouver de la part d'Auguste, et qu'elle vient à bout de le déterminer à quitter Cléopâtre. Ce changement dura peu, et le retour d'Antoine vers sa maîtresse le précipita bientôt dans sa ruine. Mais tandis qu'Octavie se croit triomphante, et qu'elle est enflée du succès de sa négociation, elle cherche l'occasion de voir sa rivale, pour insulter à sa défaite, et se vanger de tous les chagrins qu'elle a reçus d'elle. C'est cette entrevue que les critiques françois trouvoient insupportable, et aussi contraire, dans Octavie, à la modestie de son sexe qu'à la grandeur d'âme d'une Romaine. Ils reprochoient à l'auteur de prêter aux deux rivales le langage des Halles, et à la nation de marquer un fort mauvais goût dans ses applaudissemens. On en jugera mieux par la lecture même de cette scène<sup>1</sup>."

The translation follows<sup>2</sup>. It is a translation which is close enough to the original to show that Prévost's knowledge of the language was good. As would be expected in translating poetry into prose, paraphrases and circumlocutions are frequent. The rendering is rather timid than bold, which is not surprising, given the conservative character of the French language at the time. It simply shows that Prévost, as a journalist, was rather following the taste of the time than leading

meilleures tragédies du théâtre anglois, elle est traduite dans le *Pour et Contre* de M. l'Abbé Prévôt." Cf. Vol. III, p. 173, note (b), for an unfavorable estimate.

1. PC., V, 33-35.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-40.



it. "When he grew weary of *that household clog*<sup>1</sup>," is weakened to "lorsqu'il s'est trouvé fatigué de *votre mauvaise humeur*." "You have long been practi'd in *that lascivious art*<sup>2</sup>" becomes "vous êtes accoutumée depuis longtemps *au métier*," which is a rather "familiar" expression and a bit brutal, but much more vague and general than the original. "Dost thou not blush to own *those black endearments*, that make sin pleasing?" is translated: "Ne rougis-tu pas d'avouer *ces charmes détestables* qui font trouver du plaisir dans le crime?" Prévost himself, as we shall see, was perfectly conscious of the fact that the English was much more forceful and expressive; we may give him credit for having felt the strength of the language even if he did not dare try to render it in French. His desire to avoid shocking "les honnêtes gens" is evident here as in his own novels. It is not a title to blame, only we must recognize it as one more indication that he was not a "born heretic" in literary matters, but sufficiently conservative after all.

In commenting on the scene translated, the Minister says: "Voilà, Monsieur, une des plus fameuses scènes de Dryden, par la querelle dont elle fut la cause; et si vous m'en demandiez mon sentiment, j'ajouterais malgré la critique, une des plus belles. Je me suis étonné mille fois qu'un homme aussi raisonnable que ce poète ait pris le parti de se défendre par des injures, contre une accusation à laquelle le succès même de sa pièce<sup>3</sup> lui fournissoit une réponse naturelle. Il devoit dire aux critiques françois; j'ai suivi nos mœurs et nos usages. Vous ne le sentez point parce que vous êtes remplis du préjugé des vôtres: mais tous mes compatriotes le sentent, et c'est par cette raison qu'ils applaudissent. Je suis dans les bornes

1. *All for Love*, Act III, line 425.

2. *Ibid.*, lines 427-28.

3. *Ibid.*, lines 443-44.

4. Cf. the confidence of Du Bos in the judgment of the crowd, and also Voltaire's very liberal "il est impossible que toute une nation se trompe en fait de sentiment, et ait tort d'avoir du plaisir", in his *Essai sur la poésie épique*, quoted *supra*, p. 63.

de la simple nature, ou du moins de ce qui passe pour tel en Angleterre. Il nous paroît naturel qu'Octavie, fière de sa conquête, cherche Cléopâtre pour triompher d'elle, et que celle-ci, se voyant attaquée, ait aussi assez de fierté pour ne pas disparaître devant sa rivale. Or suivant nos idées, deux personnes, si odieuses l'une à l'autre, ne pouvoient se traiter avec plus de ménagement; car si l'une étoit Romaine et l'autre Reine d'Égypte, elles ne laissoient pas toutes deux d'être femmes<sup>1</sup>. " Prévost adds after the Minister's "letter": "J'aurai soin... de ne rien approuver qui ne soit conforme aux principes de religion, de bienséance et de vérité qui sont établis parmi nous. Il ne me paroît pas jusqu'à présent qu'ils s'en soit écarté, ni dans ses réflexions, ni dans ses promesses<sup>2</sup>." This is sufficiently explicit and we have every right to regard the opinions just expressed as Prévost's own. The use of the Minister as a cloak shows his caution about giving expression to such liberal views in France, but it is important not to overlook the fact that he here none the less attacks directly the French idea of the absoluteness of their rules of taste, and tells his countrymen that they are "remplis de préjugé." "La simple nature<sup>3</sup>," is the true criterion, not artificial conceptions of what is due the modesty of woman and the "grandeur d'âme d'une Romaine." Prévost here acknowledges with Fontenelle that "l'antiquité est un objet d'une espèce particulière; l'éloignement le grossit<sup>4</sup>." We shall see later more exactly just what his attitude is toward the Ancient and Modern controversy.

Note that this enlightened criticism of Dryden is of 1734,

1. PC., V, 40-41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

3. Of course it is dangerous to try to prove anything by the use of the word "nature," always invoked and often in widely different senses. The seventeenth century classicists used it and meant one thing; the romanticists, and meant another. Still it seems impossible here from the context to think that it did not in this case mean a definite effort toward realism, and the "natural" as we now use the term, psychologically true, not weakened to conform to the classic "bienséances."

4. Fontenelle, "Dialogue de Socrate et de Montaigne," *Œuvres*, 1825, Vol. III, p. 424.



the year of Voltaire's summary *ex cathedra* pronouncement, and was perhaps provoked by it. Prévost's criticism created a demand for the translation of some more scenes, and this demand he was not slow to satisfy<sup>1</sup>. In order to give a fairer and more complete idea of English drama than he had yet done, he decided to translate the whole<sup>2</sup> of the play of which he had already given some scenes. Dryden's *All for Love* was in fact particularly suitable to give the French a relatively favorable idea of English drama, not only because it was one of the author's best plays, but also because it observed the unity of place as Shakespear's *Antony and Cleopatra* had not done. In his translation Prévost felt it necessary to tone down some of the figures as being too bold for the French, and apologized for the inevitable loss of beauty and expressiveness involved. In order to make his meaning clear, he illustrated by an example. He says: "Je dois faire remarquer à l'avantage des Anglois, que soit par le caractère particulier de leur langue, soit plutôt par la hardiesse de ses figures, le style poétique de leur théâtre est incomparablement plus fort que celui du nôtre. Ainsi dans quelque exactitude que je pusse rendre la pensée du poète, je ne me flatterois jamais de pouvoir atteindre à certaines beautés qui charment les spectateurs de Londres, et qui ne charment qu'eux. Elles sont si propres à leur langue, qu'eux-mêmes peut-être ils cesseroient de les admirer dans la nôtre. Un exemple servira mieux à me faire entendre. On se souvient que dans une scène du premier acte, le belliqueux Ventidius verse quelques larmes. J'ai beaucoup altéré ses expressions; les voici, avec la traduction littérale.

"Look, emperor! this is no common dew,  
I have not wept this forty year; but now

1. "Ce n'est pas pour le seul plaisir de voir le théâtre couvert de morts, comme on s'y attend dans une catastrophe anglaise" (repeating the almost unfailing observation of his predecessors). "On voudroit sçavoir quel caractère et quel air les Anglois donnent aux Romains sur leur théâtre, et cette curiosité mérite d'être satisfaite." PC., VI, 151-52.

2. PC., VII, 123-44; 146-68; 170-240.

My mother comes afresh into my eyes;  
I cannot help her softness <sup>1</sup>. "

" Regarde, Empereur, ceci n'est pas rosée commune. Je n'ai pas pleuré de quarante ans. Mais à ce moment, ma mère revient dans mes yeux, je ne puis empêcher son attendrissement <sup>2</sup>. "

Before, on page 137, he had given the free translation :

" Mon Empereur! Voyez ce qui sort de mes yeux. Il y a quarante ans que je n'ai versé de pleurs. Mais toute la tendresse de mon enfance renaît dans mon cœur. Je ne puis les arrêter. "

Prévost's appreciation of the distinctive character of the English language is very just. It is evident too that it is not lack of knowledge which prevents him from giving always the close translation. In fact, to render more fully the life of the original would hardly be possible until after the Romantic revolution had given back to the French language some of its liberty and color lost in the seventeenth <sup>3</sup> and eighteenth centuries.

The famous lyrical ode, *Alexander's Feast, or The Power of Musique*, written by Dryden for St. Cecilia's festival in 1697, was also translated by Prévost. " Veut-on lire un chef-d'œuvre de nos voisins, et goûter du moins une partie du plaisir qu'il a causé dans sa langue naturelle ? Il faut commencer par se défaire du préjugé national, et croire un moment que le bon goût de la poésie n'est pas borné à la France. Ensuite passant sur la différence des mœurs, et calculant ce que les meilleures choses perdent dans une traduction de vers en prose, on sera à peu près dans la disposition que je demande <sup>4</sup>. "

The important thing in all this criticism is again the urging of the necessity of ridding one's self of all national prejudice and of the feeling that good taste is limited to France alone.

1. Act I, lines 261-64.

2. PC., VII, 143-46.

3. Especially in the second half of the seventeenth century.

4. PC., XI, 49.



Prévost is strongly impregnated with a sense of the relativity of all canons of taste.

His estimate of Dryden is by no means complete, nor does it attempt to be. In comparison, however, with Voltaire's summary judgment, it is most instructive and, within its limits, accurate.

## CHAPTER X

### PRÉVOST AND MILTON

Milton was already quite well known in France before Prévost went to England at all. He himself in 1731 wrote in the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*: "Je ne parle point de Milton et de Spenser dont les grands noms sont connus partout où l'on connaît les belles lettres<sup>1</sup>." This familiarity with Milton had, however, only very recently extended to include his poetry. In the seventeenth century Milton had become widely known in France as a dangerous political writer who had defended Cromwell and attacked the established order of government<sup>2</sup>. Only when the danger of the English Republic no longer threatened monarchical Europe did Milton become famous as a poet. The first to speak worthily of Milton to the French was Bayle, but even he considered him as primarily a prose writer<sup>3</sup>. Between 1728 and 1730 several publications revealed him to the public with *éclat*<sup>4</sup>. In 1729 appeared the first translation<sup>5</sup>, a poetic version which, while not exact, may still be read with pleasure, and which at the time was exceedingly popular. At least two editions appeared within a

1. *Œuvres*, II, 282.

2. Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française*, p. 14.

3. Cf. Prévost's own hostile attitude toward Cromwell as manifested in *Cléveland*. Cf. also Comminges' document, already cited and showing the conception of Milton as a dangerous political revolutionist.

4. Telleen, p. II.

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

single year and from then to the end of the century there were no less than twenty<sup>1</sup>.

The first time Prévost speaks of Milton beyond a bare mention of his name, he does so in defense of his own notable preference for blank verse. "Je crois qu'il seroit à souhaiter qu'un de nos meilleurs poètes prit la peine de composer un poème complet sans rimes, et qu'en y employant toutes ses forces, au risque d'être mal récompensé par ses contemporains, il se contentât pendant sa vie, comme Milton, de la gloire d'être entré le premier dans une route nouvelle. Je suis persuadé que quelque jugement qu'on pût porter aujourd'hui de son ouvrage, tôt ou tard le tems lui feroit rendre la justice qu'il mériteroit. C'est précisément ce qui est arrivé à Milton, à qui l'Angleterre a dressé des autels, après l'avoir laissé cinquante ans dans l'oubli<sup>2</sup>." Voltaire also at times showed himself favorable to blank verse. On the part of Prévost at least there seems to have been the vague consciousness that French poetry was sick; that in comparison with the best in English poetry it was cold and formal<sup>3</sup>. His remedy is less certain than his diagnosis.

Later Prévost speaks of Milton more at length. This time it is to regret in the first place that the *Life of Milton* by Toland — his source as it had previously been Bayle's — has not yet been translated. He criticises both Milton and Saumaise for the violence of their quarrel, a criticism very much to be expected from the ever restrained and courteous Prévost, and goes on to a defense of Milton's knowledge of Latin, though it is by no means a defense without reservations<sup>4</sup>. Then he turns to his poetry. "Pour ce qui regarde sa poésie, Dryden admirant le poème du *Paradis perdu*, a jugé que la Grèce, l'Italie et l'Angleterre ont produit trois poètes en différens siècles, Homère, Virgile, et Milton : que le premier excelle par la sublimité de

1. Telleen, pp. 27-28.

2. PC., X, 253.

3. But cf. *infra*, Chapter xvii.

4. PC., XII, 128-30.



ses pensées, le second par la majesté, et que la nature ne pouvant aller au-delà avoit formé le troisième par l'assemblage de toutes les perfections des deux autres. C'est le sujet d'une épigramme de Dryden que M. Toland a insérée dans la Vie de son héros ; et je fais cette remarque pour l'opposer à celle de M. de Voltaire, qui a prétendu que le poème de Milton étoit peu estimé en Angleterre avant que le suffrage du Docteur Atterbury et de Mylord Bullingbrock l'eût fait sortir de l'obscurité <sup>1</sup>. "Dryden's celebrated pronouncement on Milton had already been cited in France : namely, in the 1713 edition of Bayle's Dictionary <sup>2</sup>. Worth noting, however, is Prévost's purpose in repeating it. Evidently it had been pretty well forgotten, else Voltaire would not have made the claim which Prévost hastens to correct, as much no doubt for the pleasure of doing so and of finding Voltaire in error as for that of establishing the rectification itself. In the same passage there is a curious estimate of Milton as "un de ces esprits satyriques, qui se plaisent à recueillir tous les bruits qui courent au désavantage d'autrui <sup>3</sup>." He is also spoken of as having died "sans attachement pour aucune religion <sup>4</sup>," which of course needs no comment. In his treatment of various English authors, Prévost mingles with his more serious criticism anecdotes and historical facts of unequal value. There is as much of the chronicler about him as of the literary critic, and always very much of the journalist entertaining his public as well as instructing it.

Later in the same passage Prévost makes interesting mention of the less known Samson, and the quotation shows again his liking for figures that are original and striking. "On remarque," he says, "dans le *Samson Agonistes* de Milton une manière de s'exprimer sur le malheur d'être aveugle, qui est d'une force extraordinaire, et qui ne seroit peut-être

1. PC., XII, 130-31.

2. Telleen, p. 6.

3. PC., XII, 129-30.

4. *Ibid.*, XII, 134.

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jamais venue à l'esprit d'un poète qui auroit eu les yeux meilleurs que Samson. " Quoi, " fait-il dire à ce héros israélite, " je suis condamné à vivre perpétuellement dans les ténèbres ? " Je suis privé du plaisir de voir ; du plus doux de tous les plaisirs, et du plus grand de tous les biens ! Toi, ciel, qui as tout ordonné avec tant de sagesse, pourquoi attacher un trésor aussi précieux que la vue à des organes aussi foibles que les prunelles ? *Pourquoi ta toute puissance n'a-t-elle pas fait que nous pussions voir par tous les pores, comme elle a voulu que nous pussions sentir par tous les fibres ?* " Cette pensée est véritablement d'un aveugle <sup>1</sup>. " The translation is a free one. The English reads :

Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree ?  
 The Sun to me is dark  
 And silent as the Moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.  
 Since light so necessary is to life,  
 And almost life itself, if it be true  
 That light is in the soul,  
 She all in every part, *why was the sight*  
*To such a tender ball as the eye confined,*  
*So obvious and so easy to be quenched,*  
*And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,*  
*That she might look at will through every pore ?* <sup>2</sup>

Prévost's translation weakens the text very much and departs unnecessarily from it. It is to be regretted that the comparison to the moon is omitted. Yet the last figure is forceful and beautiful, and Prévost, in giving it, shows that he does have a certain appreciation for the original side of English poetry.

Prévost's estimate of Milton is then in the main just. It does not attempt to be complete in any sense of the word, and from that point of view it is disappointing. In part this incompleteness may be due to the fact that the public

1. PC, XII, 135.

2. *Samson Agonistes*, lines 85-97.



hardly needed so much to be instructed about Milton as about many other English writers. I get the impression also — though this is something which cannot be demonstrated — that Prévost himself enjoyed his Milton only moderately after all. Certainly he considered him a great poet and a champion of blank verse, but it seems that the Abbé follows rather too closely Toland and Dryden to permit us to regard him as an enthusiastic admirer on his own account of the English poet.

## CHAPTER XI

### PRÉVOST AND POPE

Pope became famous in England with the publication of *An Essay on Criticism* in 1711. This was translated into French verse by Hamilton in 1713, but the translation remained unpublished <sup>1</sup>. In 1717 appeared a translation by Robeton at Amsterdam <sup>2</sup>. The same year *Le Journal littéraire de la Haye* published its *Dissertation sur la poésie anglaise* in which Pope, along with Dryden, is compared to Boileau, a comparison repeated, so far as Pope and Boileau are concerned, by Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* <sup>3</sup>. In 1728 the *Rape of the Lock* was translated by Mme. de Caylus, and retranslated by Desfontaines in 1738. The Abbé Du Resnel published in 1730 at Paris a verse translation of the *Essay on Criticism* <sup>4</sup>. Voltaire, in a letter of February 20, 1769, to M. de Thibouville, claimed to have composed half of the verses attributed to Du Resnel <sup>5</sup>. Thus, before Prévost wrote, readers in France had already had the opportunity to become

1. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 144. Cf. PC., IX, 327.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Lettre sur les Académies* (No. 24).

4. Lanson, *op. cit.*, II, p. 143.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

familiar with Pope's *Essay on Criticism* and with the *Rape of the Lock*. This explains the fact that in the first volume of the *Pour et Contre* Prévost can refer casually to Pope as to one already generally known in France <sup>1</sup>.

In 1734 Prévost announces the appearance of the *Essay on Man*. " Il paroît depuis peu à Londres un beau poème *sur la nature et l'état de l'homme, considérez par rapport au bonheur*. C'est la quatrième partie d'un ouvrage commencé il y a déjà quelques mois sous le titre d'*Essay on Man*. On l'attribue à M. Pope. Il est digne de lui; mais je ne sçais si la querelle éclatante que M. Pope vient d'avoir avec Mylord Harrey est digne de l'auteur d'un si bel ouvrage... Pour nous expliquer avec sincérité, la différence est extrême entre les ouvrages qui viennent de la colère de M. Pope, et ceux qui sont le fruit de sa raison et de ses admirables talens <sup>2</sup>. " This passage shows very well the admirable way in which Prévost preserves his balance. While praising highly the *Essay on Man*, he is in no way blinded to Pope's frequent lack of dignity and self-control. The closing sentence of the paragraph is, for a contemporary, extraordinary. A modern critic could sum up the situation no better than does Prévost. He shows admirable impartiality and a manner of expression which is at the same time accurate and courteous.

In 1735 the author of the *Pour et Contre* announced the publication of Pope's letters, " sans son aveu, " and praised them from the advance reports in circulation <sup>3</sup>, for he had not yet had the opportunity to inform himself at first hand. The reference to the supposed publication of the letters without Pope's consent is to a device of the author's own, for he even went through the form, as it appears, of having his publisher arrested. The apparent obstacle served, of course, as Prévost adds <sup>4</sup>, to increase the eagerness of the public to read the

1. PC., I, 118-19; 167.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 161-62.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 302-03.

4. *Ibid.*, 304.



book. The letters proved to be a disappointment. We know now that they had been doctored by Pope himself. The *Pour et Contre* says of them: "Les Lettres de M. Pope que j'annonçai il y a quelques semaines, ont réuni sur deux points les sentimens du public; le stile, dit-on, en est pur et agréable, et l'esprit y brille de toutes parts. Les critiques, qui ne se bornent point à louer ce qui est digne de l'être, prétendent que c'est aussi tout ce qu'il y faut chercher, et que cette multitude d'observations littéraires, d'anecdotes curieuses de la cour et de la ville, de principes et de réflexions utiles pour toutes les sciences et tous les arts, qu'on attendoit sur les premiers bruits qui s'en étoient répandus, se réduisent à des choses assez communes, ou qui ne méritent pas du moins de si beaux noms. Je me suis trouvé de l'opinion des critiques, après avoir lu l'ouvrage; mais soit que le public ne soit point capable en effet de se tromper <sup>1</sup>, soit que je me laisse séduire par son autorité, et que je me rende l'esclave de la règle que j'ai établie, rien n'est à mon gré si ingénieux et si bien écrit que les Lettres de M. Pope. J'ajoute qu'il y règne un certain feu qui le fait reconnoître pour poète, jusques dans les choses les plus simples et les plus communes. C'est comme le *trop plein* de ses poésies <sup>2</sup>." Prévost then translates Pope's letter to Blount (January 21, 1715-16) on the death of Wycherley <sup>3</sup>. He continues: "En louant jusqu'à un certain point les Lettres de M. Pope, je ne puis m'empêcher d'observer que les plus agréables ne sont pas celles où il paroît qu'il a voulu l'être par une affectation de plaisanterie. Il est rare en effet qu'un génie aussi élevé que le sien s'abaisse sans contrainte jusqu'au badinage... Quelques traits d'une lettre badine de M. Pope vérifieront mes maximes <sup>4</sup>." He translates "une lettre badine sur les chiens <sup>5</sup>" and "une lettre galante à

1. Du Bos's idea. He thought of his public as a limited one, however.

2. PC., VII, 292-93.

3. *Ibid.*, 294-97.

4. *Ibid.*, 297-98.

5. *Ibid.*, 298-302.

Mme M...,<sup>1</sup> " which sufficiently prove his point. However, he announces that he intends in a later number to give his readers the translation of " quelques-unes de ses plus sérieuses pensées sur quelque point de littérature ou de morale, et j'annonce d'avance qu'on y reconnaîtra l'auteur de *l'Essai sur l'Homme*, et de plusieurs ouvrages du même prix<sup>2</sup>. "

The reference to the " certain feu, " which characterizes the letters and makes the author's poetic genius evident even in his prose, is noteworthy because it shows that Prévost feels an enthusiasm for Pope in spite of his accurate criticism of his faults, and one is tempted to think that this enthusiasm is greater than it is for authors more characteristically English. The charge of affectation is also just, although Prévost applies it only to the affectation of pleasantry. A modern critic judges the letters as " wanting in naturalness and charm<sup>3</sup>. " Prévost would have accepted but half of the judgment.

Later the Abbé speaks of the " goût de l'ordre, de l'élégance, de la douceur et de l'harmonie " which the English have not yet attained completely, and continues : " M. Pope est sans contredit de tous les poètes anglois celui qui a fait les plus grands pas vers la perfection dont je parle, et peut-être que l'une des meilleures preuves qu'on en pourroit apporter, c'est que de toutes les poésies de sa nation il n'y en a point de si faciles à traduire en françois que les siennes<sup>4</sup>. "

The observation that Pope is the easiest of English poets to translate into French is evidently absolutely just, since Pope does himself represent the height of the French and the classical influence in England. English literature of the age was so markedly in accord with the spirit of French classicism that no more favorable time could have been imagined in which to introduce it into France. It is not

1. PC., VII, 302-06.

2. *Ibid.*, 306.

3. Professor Bensley in the *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. IX, p. 94.

4. PC., IX, 334-35.



to be overlooked that Prévost in this passage obviously has a strong preference for the orderly and harmonious over the lawless beauties more generally characteristic of English literature, and he considers the former qualities as the ideal to be attained. In this he was very much a Frenchman of his time. This is not a reproach, especially since we have already seen that he by no means excludes other, and freer, kinds of beauty. Only, it is well to observe his attitude here in order not to form a false conception of the degree to which he was given over to English romantic standards. In fact the ideals current in England at this time were not far from his own, and though one cannot deny that the immediate effect was narrowing, especially in regard to the attitude toward Shakespeare, yet it is equally impossible to refuse to admit that French influence on English literature was in the long run beneficent and a necessary corrective to the excesses into which the successors of Shakespeare, copying his faults but without his genius, fell. So Prévost's attitude is eminently just and is further evidence of the general saneness of his criticism.

As proof of the excellence of Dryden's *Feste d'Alexandre*, Pope's Essay on Criticism is invoked and a part of it cited and translated into prose<sup>1</sup>. Pope is evidently treated as an authority. The Abbé du Resnel's translation of the Essay on Man is preferred to that of the Essay on Criticism, partly because the subject matter itself seems less didactic<sup>2</sup>. In a later passage Prévost, while acknowledging the poetic qualities of Du Resnel's translations, praises the greater fidelity of those of M. de Seré. He then goes on to defend Pope in his usual sensible fashion against the charge of irreligion<sup>3</sup>. Characteristically, he avoids any philosophical discussion of the Essay on Man, but intervenes between Crouzas and Pope's English defender, Warburton, with a

1. PC., XI, 61.

2. *Ibid.*, XII, 23-24.

3. *Ibid.*, XVI, 238-39.

plain common-sense remark regarding Pope's persistent clinging to Catholicism even when his interests might well be better furthered by professing accord with the Church of England. The defense is just, though it fails to take into account the fact that Pope was in reality much nearer the deistic position than perhaps even he himself supposed <sup>1</sup>. Another passage refers to the same controversy <sup>2</sup>. A recurrence of the criticism of Pope's caustic temper is to be expected from what we know of Prévost's own admirable patience and self-control <sup>3</sup>.

The remarks on Pope are distinguished on the whole by a sense of just appreciation both of his merits and of his faults. As the English poet was still living during the whole period of the publication of the *Pour et Contre*, a more complete estimate of his genius could hardly be expected at a time when literary criticism was still so much in its infancy. Within its limits there could certainly be no fairer estimate. The whole does much credit to Prévost's impartiality, as, however, it also testifies to the essentially French character of his taste, mellowed though this was by an intelligent liberalism which was itself to a great extent an outgrowth of his inherent sense of fairness.

1. It is interesting to compare Rousseau's equally characteristic attitude toward this same matter, "M. de Crouzas vient de nous donner une réfutation des Epîtres de Pope, que j'ai lue avec ennui. Je ne sais pas au vrai lequel des deux auteurs a raison; mais je sais bien que le livre de M. de Crouzas ne fera jamais faire une bonne action, et qu'il n'y a rien de bon qu'on ne soit tenté de faire en quittant celui de Pope." *Nouvelle Héloïse*, seconde partie, lettre XVIII.

2. PC., XVI, 241-49.

3. *Ibid.*, 239.



## CHAPTER XII

## PRÉVOST AND SHAFTESBURY

" Tous les ouvrages de ce seigneur... consistent en morceaux détachés. C'est un des plus ingénieux et des plus agréables écrivains d'Angleterre <sup>1</sup>. "

" Mylord Shaftesbury, qui semble avoir connu mieux que personne le génie de sa nation, est d'un sentiment tout opposé [à celui de Voltaire]. En convenant que les tragédies angloises sont fort éloignées de la perfection, il n'attribue point le mal à d'autre cause qu'à la négligence des Anglois, dont la source, dit-il, est leur vanité. Ils reconnoissent, ajoute-t-il, en quoi ils manquent, mais ils ne veulent point prendre la peine qu'il faut pour être plus exacts. *Miscellaneous Reflexions*, pp. 258-59 <sup>2</sup>. "

Without here weighing the truth of Shaftesbury's observation, we can be content to note the esteem in which he is held by Prévost. Very great authority is accorded to him. He seems to have understood better than anyone else " le génie de sa nation. " *C'est beaucoup dire*.

This was by no means a mere passing opinion of Prévost, for he cites Shaftesbury frequently. Of Hamlet he says that it is a play, " où l'on ne trouve, " dit Mylord Shaftesbury, " no " ranting at the gods, no blustering heroison, no adoration or " flattery of the sex, nor anything of that curious mixture of " the fierce and tender which makes the hinge of modern tragedy. " Advice to an Author, p. 276 <sup>3</sup>. " Here by implication Prévost puts himself on the side of the English author in admiring Hamlet, and again it is a point of issue with Voltaire. It is worth noting here that Prévost even abstains from quoting

1. PC., II, 34, note (b).

2. *Ibid.*, I, 284-85, note (a). The pagination in the fourth edition of Shaftesbury's works, Dublin, 1737-43, 3 vols., is the same as Prévost's.

3. *Ibid.*, I, 280, note (b). Cf. *supra*, Chapter vi, p. 53.

the part of Shaftesbury's previous page where certain reserves had been made in his admiration <sup>1</sup>. No doubt this is in part because in this particular instance the Abbé preferred to differ as much as possible from Voltaire, but it is probable also that he was willing to go as far as the English author in his admiration of Shakespear. Shaftesbury would not take him farther than a Frenchman of liberal tendencies would be able comfortably to go.

A part of Shaftesbury's *Miscellaneous Reflections* is translated <sup>2</sup>, but it has no bearing on literary criticism. One passage calls him "un écrivain célèbre <sup>3</sup>," and in another he stands, with Barrow, Newton, and Locke, as one of the four "Demi-Dieux anglois <sup>4</sup>."

It is not possible from these passages to determine the influence of Shaftesbury upon Prévost. It is evident that some influence must have existed, since Prévost's admiration is clearly great. Shaftesbury's classical training and tastes made him particularly easy for a Frenchman to admire, even a Frenchman of much less liberal mind than Prévost. Shaftesbury turns in fact by preference away from Shakespear, and to some extent also even from contemporary literature of his own country to the more rigid classicism of France <sup>5</sup>. One may well question whether, of the two, Prévost himself was not the more liberal spirit. It is certainly probable that

1. *Characteristicks*, Vol. I, 273. "Notwithstanding his natural rudeness, his unpolish'd style, his antiquated phrase and wit, his want of method and coherence, and his deficiency in almost all the graces and ornaments of this kind of writings; yet..." etc.

2. PC., IV, 299-300.

3. *Ibid.*, VI, 313.

4. *Ibid.*, IV, 78-79. Cf. PC., IV, 253, where he is mentioned with Milton, Shakespear, and Nassau as one of "ces quatre grands hommes." His opinion is cited also in PC., III, 54, and XVI, 235-36.

5. "Die englischen Dichter der nächsten Gegenwart, so sichtlich sie auch der französischen Regelmässigkeit zuschreiten, sind ihm doch noch immer nicht streng genug an Gesetz und Regel gebunden; in Shakespeare zumal sieht er nichts als tumultuarische Rohheit." Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, p. 176. But this last statement is evidently too strong, on the showing of the Hamlet passage above.



Englishmen like Shaftesbury, more or less French in their tastes, were very useful intermediaries in helping French critics to gain a not too unfavorable idea of English literature and in hastening its popularity in France. From that point of view it is very significant that Prévost accords him so important a position in English thought.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### PRÉVOST AND STEELE

Addison, as we have seen, was already well known on the continent. In fact he was the first English dramatist sincerely admired in France<sup>1</sup>. The name of Steele of course was associated with his and with the translation of the *Spectator* which began to appear in 1714. *Le Babillard* (The Tatler), in which Steele had a more prominent part than in the *Spectator*, was translated by Armand de la Chapelle between 1723 and 1725<sup>2</sup>. Already in 1715 certain *Œuvres diverses de Steele* had appeared in a single octavo volume. *Le Mentor moderne* (The Guardian) had been translated by Van Effen in 1723<sup>3</sup>. Thus, in dealing with Steele also, Prévost was treating an author quite well known outside of England. Voltaire in the *Lettres philosophiques* had passed him by with a bare mention as one of the "bons poètes comiques" of England<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless Prévost's contribution to the knowledge of Steele in France was to be by no means an unimportant one. Just as, in Dryden's *All for Love*, he had already offered his public the opportunity to read and judge for themselves one of England's best tragedies, so now in Steele's *Conscious Lovers* he givesthem a chance to enjoy one of the best comedies of

1. Jusserand, p. 62.

2. Lanson, *Manuel bibliographique*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Lettres philosophiques*, Vol. II, p. 109.

the time <sup>1</sup>. This translation is complete and runs through more than half of the eighth volume of the *Pour et Contre* <sup>2</sup>. It appeared in 1736. The wording of the statement <sup>3</sup> which Prévost made just before beginning the translation leaves a little doubt as to whether he was himself the author of it.

Significant is the following comment after the first act of the *Conscious Lovers*. "On a remarqué sans doute dans ce qu'on a lu jusqu'ici, plus d'ordre et de bienséance qu'on n'en attendoit dans une comédie angloise, et j'avoue que c'est un sujet d'étonnement pour moi, que sur les mêmes théâtres où l'on voit paroître tous les jours avec succès les bouffonneries les plus basses et les plus indécentes, on ait accordé tant d'applaudissemens à une pièce si exacte et si modeste. Il en faut conclure que ce n'est pas faute de goût que les Anglois tardent si longtems à épurer tout à fait leur théâtre, et que si leur pratique est encore inférieure à leurs idées, on ne doit peut-être en accuser que la tyrannie de l'habitude. Mais la suite de notre traduction justifiera encore mieux cette remarque <sup>4</sup>."

It was hardly by chance that Prévost chose to translate as examples of English tragedy and of English comedy two plays which, though very different from French drama, yet had undergone to some extent its influence, and hence were not so markedly in opposition to the prevailing classic rules. In introducing English literature to the French, Prévost proceeded with judgment and insinuated his views with tact. He

1. "... pour commencer ici la traduction d'une des plus belles comédies du théâtre anglois. Elle m'est demandée par ceux à qui la *Mort d'Antoine* et de *Cléopâtre* a fait souhaiter de connoître aussi le goût de nos voisins pour le genre comique. La pièce est regardée comme la meilleure de celles de M. *Steele*. Que la traduction soit de ma main ou de celle d'un autre, c'est ce qu'il y a de moins important, pourvu qu'elle soit bonne. Le titre est *The Conscious Lovers*, qu'on traduirait fort bien en latin par *Conscii Amantes*, mais auquel je n'ai rien trouvé qui réponde mieux en françois que *l'Amour confident de lui-même*." PC., VIII, 108.

2. PC., VIII, 109-321.

3. Given *supra*, note 1.

4. PC., VIII, 186.



realized the danger of arousing hostility from the very beginning were he to choose plays too strikingly different from those sanctioned by prevailing French taste. It seems probable moreover that in the passage just cited he was doing more than merely putting himself tactfully in accord with his readers, and that he himself believed that many of the extravagances of the English theater ought to be curtailed by a reasonable adherence to the rules. Certainly the reference (so frequent under his pen) to the "*bouffonneries les plus basses et les plus indécentes*" was aimed directly at the excesses of the Restoration drama and of the plays more or less in the same style which still persisted in England, though they were gradually dying out under the influence of the warfare begun so notably by Jeremy Collier in 1698. Toward plays of that type Prévost's attitude is clear. It is not so much the irregularity of the English theater that he condemns here as its coarseness of taste. The same note recurs in his criticism of Swift. It seems that what he hopes to see on both sides of the Channel is a judicious mingling of the English and of the French rules of taste with avoidance of the excesses of both. The tendency is noticeable here, as elsewhere, to accord much more respect to the "*bienséances*" than was formerly supposed. Similarly Prévost likes to point out that after all the English are nearer the fold than his compatriots think; that it is only a question of time when they will follow the rules which they already esteem in theory. This is very much the position of Shaftesbury, though he, with less reason for having to be polite, explains on other grounds the delay in bringing about the reform.

A noteworthy passage is the following :

"A la réserve de quelques libertez nationales, et d'un petit nombre de fautes contre ce que nous nommons les règles, je ne vois rien dans toute la pièce qui ne puisse entrer en comparaison avec ce que notre théâtre a produit de plus estimé. Que le fond du sujet soit pris de Térence, il ne seroit pas plus juste d'en faire un reproche à M. Steele que d'en faire un à

Térence d'avoir pris les siens de Ménandre. L'unité de lieu paroîtra blessée dans la plupart des scènes ; mais le raisonnement des Anglois en faveur de cet usage de leur théâtre est-il destitué de force et de vraisemblance ? Ils conviennent que c'est une chose monstrueuse que de faire passer en un moment l'œil du spectateur d'une partie du monde à l'autre, ou même du lieu présent de la scène à tout autre lieu dont la distance ne puisse s'accorder avec l'unité de l'action principale ; et sur ce principe ils ne balancent point à condamner Shakespear d'avoir mis sur la scène, dans une même pièce, le meurtre de Jules César à Rome et la mort de Brutus dans les champs de Philippes. Mais commel'unique fondement de cette règle est l'égard raisonnable qu'on doit toujours à la vraisemblance, ils prétendent qu'elle n'est pas moins blessée par les bornes trop étroites auxquelles nos auteurs se réduisent ; car la raison, disent-ils, ne permet pas de supposer que neuf ou dix personnages qui sont en action pendant l'espace d'un jour ou d'environ vingt-quatre heures, se rencontrent ou se rejoignent toujours au même endroit lorsqu'ils ont quelque chose à démêler entr'eux. Il est bien plus naturel de les représenter dans tous les endroits où les différentes circonstances de l'intrigue ont dû les conduire, en aidant l'imagination et les yeux du spectateur par le changement subit des décorations, qui dépend de l'habileté des machinistes. Ainsi, dans la comédie qu'on vient de lire, la scène est tantôt chez M. Bevil, tantôt chez M. Seiland, tantôt au Parc de Saint James ou dans la maison d'Indiane, tantôt dans un lieu ouvert ou dans un lieu fermé ; et cette variété soulage bien plus l'imagination qu'elle ne la gêne, parce qu'elle répond en effet à la vérité des choses, qui doit être respectée comme la principale règle dans la conduite de toutes les pièces de théâtre. Où est l'imagination assez crédule pour se persuader que dans Phèdre, dans Bérénice, dans Mithridate, dans Britannicus, etc., tous les Acteurs, malgré la variété de leurs mouvemens et de leurs intérêts, se rencontrent à point nommé dans le même lieu, soit pour parler, soit pour agir ?



" Ces réflexions m'en ont fait naître d'autres ausquelles je regretterois de ne pouvoir donner place ici, si j'avois entrepris de justifier l'auteur anglois sur tous les points où il s'écarte de nos mœurs et de nos usages. Mais je le répète; ce n'est point à l'apologie de nos voisins que je me suis engagé dans le Pour et Contre. Je parle de leurs ouvrages, de leur goût, de leur caractère et de leurs coutumes, en simple historien qui veut les faire connoître, et faciliter au lecteur le moyen de les comparer avec les nôtres. C'est dans la même vue que j'entre souvent dans les mêmes détails sur tout ce qui nous regarde, parce que rien ne facilite tant les comparaisons que d'en rapprocher les termes <sup>1</sup>. "

Here we get a more precise pronouncement on what Prévost rather disparagingly refers to as " ce que nous nommons les règles <sup>2</sup>. " Equally condemned are the lawlessness of some of Shakespear's plays <sup>3</sup> and servile obedience to the rules of time and place even then current <sup>4</sup> on the French stage. Here

1. PC., VIII, 322-25.

2. Attacking probably the absoluteness and the dogmatism of the followers of the rules.

3. Gildon observed in his *Remarks on Shakespear's Plays* (p. 347) : " It is not to be doubted that he would have given us far more noble plays if he had had the good fortune to have seen but any one regular performance of this nature. The beauty of order would have struck him immediately, and at once have made him more correct and more excellent. " The attitude of Prévost is not different.

4. D. Mornet, " La Question des règles au dix-huitième siècle, " *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 1914, pp. 249-50. " Les règles " de la poésie et de l'éloquence, disait Geoffroy en 1801, fondées sur la " nature, sont immuables comme elle. " Ce fut là le terme inébranlable où la plupart des critiques s'arrêtèrent. Tous ont cru qu'il y avait des règles littéraires précises. Il serait vain de poursuivre, de Desfontaines à la Harpe ou de Fréron à Geoffroy, la croyance fidèle à leur autorité...

" Népomucène Lemerrier déterminera les vingt-six règles du genre tragique ; les critiques du dix-huitième siècle les ont dénombrées moins exactement, mais leur respect fut aussi méthodique. Gaullier (1728) étudie le poème dramatique : Article I : De la fable ; — Sec. 1 : Manière de faire une fable ; — 2 : des Episodes ; — 3 : de l'Action ; — 4 : de l'unité d'action dramatique ; — 5 : de la simplicité de l'action dramatique ; — 6 : de la continuité ; — 7 : de l'intégrité ; — 8 : de la vraisemblance ; — 9 : de l'unité de temps ; — 10 : de l'unité de lieu, etc. Soit plus de trois cents pages d'impératifs catégoriques. "

the last word has been said on the matter of the rules. The unity of the main action is made the test of whether the other unities are sufficiently observed or not, and "la vérité des choses" is the chief rule to be respected in the drama. What more remains to be said to-day? Prévost's liberalism consists, not in want of respect for the rules, but in the clear perception of the fact that it is the spirit, not the letter, which matters. He shows both intelligence and moderation; his balance and his poise distinguish him. It should not be forgotten that his statement comes nearly a hundred years before *Hernani*. It is true that in his time Frenchmen were beginning to call the rules in question. La Motte observes in 1725 that many authors fail "par une scrupuleuse affectation d'observer les règles<sup>1</sup>." Voltaire in the *Préface d'Œdipe* (1730) speaks of those who have loaded down "presque tous les arts d'un nombre prodigieux de règles, dont la plupart sont inutiles ou fausses<sup>2</sup>." If art "doit soumettre," Montesquieu admits also that there are times when "il doit être soumis<sup>3</sup>." But none the less, M. Mornet observes that "jusqu'à la fin du dix-huitième siècle la critique raisonnable ou philosophique reste donc la critique essentielle<sup>4</sup>." "Tous citent Boileau avec piété et restent dociles à ses méthodes<sup>5</sup>." Indications point already to the formation of historical criticism, point also toward impressionistic methods of judging, but these, particularly in the first half of the century, remain secondary. Thus we see that Prévost is with the party of progress, and he did not, like Voltaire, become reactionary afterwards. If others sporadically called the rules in question, none did so with more fairness and evenness of judgment than he. Note too that in taking his examples of the weakness of the conventional rules, he goes directly to their very best and most successful exponent,

1. Mornet, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Loc. cit.* Theoretically, Boileau also had admitted this principle.

4. Mornet, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

5. *Loc. cit.*



Racine <sup>1</sup>. Even in Racine, says Prévost, — and we know nevertheless that the works of Racine were among his three favorites <sup>2</sup>, — even in Racine there are offenses against probability; just as on the other hand in Shakespear. Thus he set over against each other the two greatest representatives of dramatic art in their respective countries, each diametrically opposed, neither without faults.

It is evident that Prévost desired to see introduced into the theater all reforms which would tend to greater "vraisemblance." In a later volume he translates at length some observations of Steele's which attack particularly monologues, asides, and all expositions made expressly for the spectators <sup>3</sup>.

One other passage treats of Steele. This speaks briefly of his work as a journalist. Of the Guardian, Prévost says: "En rendant justice à l'esprit et au sçavoir de l'auteur, on se trouve trop souvent refroidi par ses réflexions politiques, qui recommencèrent à devenir le goût de son tems <sup>4</sup>." This estimate is singularly precise and just, and is in accord with modern criticism. The Tatler and the Spectator are of course mentioned favorably.

As a whole, the observations on Steele are of particular importance. The discussion of the question of the rules is not to be surpassed and is exceptional for the time. In translating the Conscious Lovers entire, Prévost introduced into France a comedy, which, while not one of the greatest English masterpieces, is Steele's best dramatic work and had at the time certain aspects of especial interest. Its comparative regularity made it particularly suitable to win French approval; its satire is directed especially against duelling and marriages of

1. So Stendhal wrote his *Racine et Shakespeare*.

2. The others were Fénelon's *Télémaque* and La Bruyère's *Caractères*. MHQ., I, 170.

3. PC., XII, 296-306. Cf. La Motte. Voltaire resisted the proposed innovations. Lanson, *Hist. de la litt. fr.*, p. 648.

Gildon takes much the same attitude as Steele. *Remarks on Shakespear*, pp. 353 ff.; p. 412.

4. PC., XIX, 299.

convenience ; the opposition between the hereditary gentry and the rising commercial class is portrayed clearly in the play ; Bevil represents Steele's idea of a gentleman, sincere and honorable on all occasions. Whether Prévost's aim in selecting this play was to attack existing abuses is not clear. It is possible at least. His general attitude leads one to suspect that the drama with a moral purpose was fitted to please him particularly, provided art was not too much sacrificed. However that may be, soon Diderot will write his bourgeois dramas, Rousseau will attack duelling and licentiousness. Consciously or unconsciously, Prévost is in the forward-current.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PRÉVOST AND SWIFT

Swift attracted the attention of French journalists before Prévost. " Ils aiment sa plaisanterie acérée et un peu grasse, son rire narquois, sa moquerie amère <sup>1</sup>. " Texte observes also that as early as 1713 *le Journal littéraire* announced several of his works and later published parts of Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub. In 1720 *la Bibliothèque angloise* translated the Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue (Vol. VIII, Part I). The following year Van Effen translated and published at The Hague the Tale of a Tub, and finally, in 1727, Desfontaines translated Gulliver, which had appeared in England the previous year <sup>2</sup>. The same year Voltaire wrote of Swift to Thieriot : " C'est le Rabelais de l'Angleterre, comme je vous l'ai déjà mandé ; mais c'est un Rabelais sans fatras, et ce livre [Gulliver] serait amusant par lui-même, par ces imaginations singulières dont il est plein, par la légèreté de son style, quand il ne serait pas d'ailleurs la satire du genre humain <sup>3</sup>. " In

1. Texte, p. 34.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

3. Letter of February 2, 1727.



his treatment of the second part of *Gulliver*, however, observes M. Lanson, he qualified somewhat his praise<sup>1</sup>. In the *Lettres philosophiques* he speaks of the "ingénieux Docteur Suift, qu'on appelle le Rabelais d'Angleterre," and continues: "Il a l'honneur d'être prêtre comme Rabelais, et de se moquer de tout comme lui; mais on lui fait grand tort, selon mon petit sens, de l'appeler de ce nom"; but later: "M. Suift est Rabelais dans son bon sens, et vivant en bonne compagnie<sup>2</sup>; il n'a pas à la vérité la gaieté du premier, mais il a toute la finesse, la raison, le choix, le bon goût qui manque à notre Curé de Meudon. Ses vers sont d'un goût singulier et presque inimitable; la bonne plaisanterie est son partage en vers et en prose, mais pour le bien entendre, il faut faire un petit voyage dans son pays<sup>3</sup>." In our discussion of the *Lettres philosophiques*<sup>4</sup> we have already noted how Prévost criticized this exaggeration of Swift's "bon goût." The Abbé himself, however, falls somewhat into the same tendency when he mentions "M. le Doyen Swift, connu par la finesse et l'agrément de son esprit, et père d'une infinité de petits ouvrages qui portent ces deux caractères<sup>5</sup>." Prévost then goes on to give the narrative of an attack on Swift's life in Ireland<sup>6</sup>.

In Volume V of the *Pour et Contre* Prévost speaks of him as "le fameux Docteur Swift qui se plaint avec sa gayeté ordinaire du triste état où ses infirmités le réduisent<sup>7</sup>." The reference to "sa gayeté ordinaire" is typical and at the same time noteworthy. Prévost here, even less than Voltaire, who admitted that Swift lacked the gaiety of Rabelais, seems little to realize the bitter tragedy of Swift's life. The verses Prévost

1. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, p. 142.

2. Has Voltaire been noting the frequent references in Swift's correspondence with Pope to the usquebaugh, which seemed to lie nearest his heart?

3. Lanson, *Lettres phil.*, II, pp. 135-36.

4. *Supra*, Chapter vi.

5. PC., III, 57.

6. *Ibid.*, III, 57-62.

7. *Ibid.*, V, 267.

translates after the above passage are indeed far from gay. Only the last two lines have the slightest touch of humor, and that bitter enough, even when one remembers that Swift was not married and that these two lines are not then autobiographical, although the references to his deafness and giddiness are. As early as 1727 in fact his health was bad <sup>1</sup>, and he gradually grew worse. Hettner states: "Im Jahr 1736 fing er an, sein Gedächtniss zu verlieren... Seit dem Jahr 1740 verfiel er in einem Zustand, der, wie Walter Scott sich ausdrückt, vom Dichter, Humoristen und Politiker nichts mehr übrig liess als ein elendes menschliches Geschöpf, das fortfuhr zu athmen, ohne jemals wieder den mindesten Funken seines ausserordentlichen Geistes zu zeigen. In den letzten zwei oder drei Jahren hat Swift kaum mehr ein Wort gesprochen <sup>2</sup>." In connection with such a state of health the following lines seem anything but gay.

Deaf, giddy, helpless, left alone,  
To all my friends a burthen grown,  
No more I hear my church's bell  
Than if it rang out for my knell:  
At thunder now no more I start  
Than at the rumbling of a cart:  
Nay, what's incredible, alack!  
I hardly hear my wife's clack <sup>3</sup>.

In another passage Prévost says: "Il faut connoître le caractère de M. le Docteur Swift pour ne rien perdre de ses vues dans le projet qu'il vient de faire éclore, et pour donner à la plus généreuse action de sa vie toute l'admiration qu'elle mérite. Ce célèbre Doyen de Saint Patrice est en possession depuis trente ans, de faire rire les trois royaumes d'Angleterre, d'Irlande et d'Ecosse, par sa manière de vivre, de penser

1. Writing to Pope, Oct. 12, 1727, Swift mentions his giddiness and his "comfortless deafness" (Pope's Works, Courthope and Elwin, 1871, Vol. VII, p. 100). Later there are frequent similar references. Cf. Pope to Swift, Vol. VII, p. 124, and Swift to Pope, pp. 140, 142.

2. Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, p. 301.

3. PC., V, 267-68. Prévost translates the verses.



et d'écrire. Cent traits agréables de sa conduite, et un nombre infini d'ouvrages tant en prose qu'en vers, où si l'on veut retrancher certaines idées basses et populaires, on trouve d'ailleurs tout le sel et l'agrément que les Anglois lui attribuent, l'ont fait regarder comme le modèle de la fine satire, de l'ironie délicate, et de la plaisanterie la plus ingénieuse et la plus agréable. Il n'est connu en France que par le *Gulliver* et le *Conte du Tonneau* dont on nous a donné la traduction ; mais quoique ces deux ouvrages ne fassent nul tort à sa réputation, je m'imagine qu'elle paroîtroit mieux fondée à nos François s'il étoit trouvé quelqu'un qui nous eût traduit ses épîtres et ses poèmes, avec plusieurs petites pièces sur divers sujets, dont la beauté même a peut-être causé de l'embarras aux traducteurs (a)..... Enfin, quelque'idée qu'on s'en forme en France, il est certain par le jugement et le témoignage d'une nation des plus éclairées, que M. Swift est un écrivain d'un mérite distingué, et que la comparaison qu'on fait de lui avec Rabelais ne déshonore point le bon Curé de Meudon.

“ C'est apparemment par les qualitez qui forment leur ressemblance, que le Doyen de Saint Patrice se regarde avec le plus de complaisance, puisqu'après avoir médité longtems sur la manière d'immortaliser son nom, il en a choisi une qui ne pouvoit tomber que dans l'esprit de Rabelais ou dans le sien. Il est riche et sans héritiers. L'usage qu'il a résolu de faire de ses richesses est d'élever un bâtiment qui servira de retraite à tous les fous et à tous les lunatiques d'Irlande.

“(a) Il ne seroit pourtant pas à souhaiter pour son honneur, qu'on traduisît ses *Pensées diverses*. Elles passent en Angleterre pour originales ; mais on reconnoit ici qu'elles sont pillées pour la plupart dans la Bruière et la Rochefoucault. Il y en a quelques-unes néanmoins qui sont de lui <sup>1</sup>. ”

Again the idea of a gay buffoon. In his treatment of the “ batiment pour les fous et les lunatiques, ” it does not appear that Prévost has taken seriously the pamphlet of 1733 entitled :

1. PC., VI, 7-40.

A Serious and Useful Scheme to make a Hospital for Incubables, into which, as one of the "scribbling incurables," Swift had expressed the hope that he might be himself admitted. Rather it seems to be a semi-humorous treatment of Swift's perfectly serious later project to provide a retreat for those who might fall into the same utterly miserable condition as himself<sup>1</sup>. Thus again Prévost has failed to understand the real tragedy of Swift's life, and by his attitude has made it clear that he is not yet awake to humanitarian movements. The project of an asylum for the insane is to him nothing but a merry jest.

In admiring so highly Swift's poetry Prévost can no longer be upheld by modern criticism, for, though Swift did obtain some success in his lighter and satirical verse, he had no real poetic gift<sup>2</sup>. His verse has been described as having very little imagination or sentiment; as merely witty prose put into fluent verse, with clever rimes<sup>3</sup>. Voltaire was not behind Prévost in his admiration for Swift's poetry, and in the case of both this admiration seems highly significant. Not only Voltaire then, but also Prévost, that most Anglicized Frenchman (in Texte's phrase), is very much in accord with the classical school, whether it be in France or England, and shows little interest in poetry of a more romantic and lyrical character<sup>4</sup>. In this he is essentially of the early eighteenth century, and not in advance of his contemporaries.

More happily, Prévost calls attention to the distinctiveness of Swift's genius. "Si l'on a vu le Docteur Swift revenir souvent sur la scène, il n'est copié nulle part; c'est le propre de

1. Hettner notes (*op. cit.*, I, p. 301): "Im Gefühl dieser Lage schrieb er sein Testament und bestimmte sein Eigenthum, zehntausend Pfund, die er sich trotz vielseitiger Mildthätigkeit erspart hatte, zur Errichtung eines Irrenhauses."

2. Cf. PC, XII, 97: "Je ne sais par quel dépit contre les Muses le Docteur Swift a nommé l'art poétique la partie la moins sensée de la littérature." The reason is not far to seek.

3. *Cambridge History*, IX, p. 438.

4. Witness his scant interest in Thompson.



son caractère que de quelque côté qu'on le montre, il est toujours original <sup>1</sup>."

Later he mentions his intention of translating some of Swift's "pensées détachées," which he says the English compare to La Rochefoucauld <sup>2</sup>. Before, the same comparison had been used by Prévost himself with the idea of taking from Swift's originality, but now nothing is said of that. The cynicism common to the two writers does in fact make the comparison reasonably just. Swift himself wrote to Pope in 1725 of "Rochefoucauld, who is my favorite, because I found my whole character in him <sup>3</sup>."

The amusing and well known story of the Partridge hoax is recounted in full <sup>4</sup>. Prévost translated also a part of Swift's satirical scheme for reforming the theaters <sup>5</sup>, according to which the actors would have been obliged to act as valets to the poets, brushing their clothes, helping them to dress, etc. A further suggestion was a "Council of Six" to be placed in the theater in full view of the audience to indicate which passages should be applauded and which hissed.

Prévost used an interesting and effective means of making his readers understand the great deficiencies of a prose translation of poetry <sup>6</sup>. Probably some of his subscribers had complained of disappointment with English poetry and such a demonstration was needed. He turns into prose a piece of Fontenelle's verse and two epigrams of de Charval's, then gives the originals. "Qu'après avoir comparé tous ces vers avec l'espèce de traduction où j'ai rendu exactement le même sens, on me dise pourquoi l'on y trouve quelque chose de plus agréable et de plus piquant que dans ma prose; et je me servirai de la

1. PC., VI, 129.

2. *Ibid.*, XI, 300.

3. Nov. 26, 1725. Pope's *Works*. Vol. VII, pp. 63-64. Six years later in his lines on his own death his opinion is the same.

4. PC., XI, 313-60.

5. *Ibid.*, XII, 148-52.

6. Du Bos had used the same method, taking two lines from Racine and putting them into prose. *Réflexions*, II, p. 555.

même raison pour expliquer comment les meilleures pièces de poésie angloise ne nous paroissent pas toujours mériter les éloges qu'elles reçoivent à Londres. Au reste je n'ai pas prétendu faire ici une remarque nouvelle, mais je me suis cru intéressé à réveiller l'attention de mes lecteurs sur ce que personne n'ignore <sup>1</sup>. " Such a concrete demonstration was naturally worth far more than a mere statement of fact, however often repeated.

The *Martinus Scriblerus* and *Peri Bathous*, or, as Prévost calls it, *le Traité du Profond* <sup>2</sup>, is classed with *Hudibras* as one of two " des plus célèbres ouvrages dont l'Angleterre se vante <sup>3</sup>, " and much space is justly given to it. Professor Saintsbury calls it one of Swift's most characteristic critical works <sup>4</sup>. " Le traité du Profond, " says Prévost, " est une autre nouveauté qui ne peut être comparée à rien, quoiqu'elle appartienne en général au genre ironique, dont tous les tems nous fournissent assez d'exemples ; mais il y a quelque chose de si neuf dans l'imagination de l'auteur, et de si original dans l'exécution comme dans le sujet de son Traité, qu'on ne lui disputera point l'honneur de s'être ouvert une route nouvelle et d'y avoir marché d'un pas qui lui est propre <sup>5</sup>..... Tous ces exemples [d'auteurs qui ont donné dans le profond] forment un recueil singulier dans leur langue. La nôtre en fourniroit-elle moins, si l'on commençoit, je ne dis pas au tems de du Bartas, mais aux Scudéris, aux le Moines, aux Chappelains et aux des Marets, qui fleurissoient sous Louis le Grand ; et si l'on descendoit, depuis ces héros du profond, jusqu'à nous <sup>6</sup> ? " The translation is continued at length <sup>7</sup>, unfortunately without, as Prévost repeats, the examples from English authors. However, there is enough to give a fairly complete

1. PC., XIII, 207.

2. Sometimes, however, attributed to Pope.

3. PC., XIII, 289.

4. *Hist. of Crit.*, Vol. II, p. 452.

5. PC., XIII, 290.

6. *Ibid.*, 312.

7. *Ibid.*, 324-35.



idea of the work, and certainly Swift appears very much to his advantage, as Prévost himself observes <sup>1</sup>.

Prévost's readers were fond of English epigrams. In fact Lebrun in France later raised the genre to the height of an artistic triumph. In consequence they appear rather frequently in the *Pour et Contre*, much too frequently from the modern point of view. Space is given to some of Swift's <sup>2</sup>, but they have little importance beside his other work. Swift is also spoken of as about to compose in his old age a work in defense of religion to offset the Tale of a Tub and other satires, which the English apologist cited by Prévost says were not really directed against Christianity, but had been by many incorrectly interpreted to be so <sup>3</sup>.

In summing up Prévost's treatment of Swift, we see that the French author had an almost total misconception of his fundamental spirit of bitterness, far removed from the idea of the gay jester offered to the readers of the *Pour et Contre*. The two greatest works, Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub, are not discussed at all, but only mentioned in passing. The reason can hardly be that they were already too well known in France. If they had pleased Prévost, he would scarcely have passed them over with the deprecatory phrase: " Il n'est connu en France que par le *Gulliver* et le *Conte du Tonneau*, dont on nous a donné la traduction ; mais quoique ces deux ouvrages ne fassent nul tort à sa réputation, je m'imagine qu'elle paroîtroit mieux fondée à nos François s'il s'étoit trouvé quelqu'un qui nous eût traduit ses Epîtres et ses poèmes, avec plusieurs petites pièces sur divers sujets, dont la beauté même <sup>4</sup>, " etc. To prefer the epistles and the poems and the " petites pièces " to Gulliver and the Tale of a Tub is sufficiently to indicate that he did not understand the genius of Swift, too different, in his best work, from the French standards of the period. Too

1. PC., XIII, 335. Also XIX, 157.

2. *Ibid.*, XVI, 155-58.

3. *Ibid.*, XVI, 159-60.

4. *Ibid.*, VI, 8-9.

much space is given to mere anecdote and unimportant epigram, but we must not forget that as a journalist Prévost had first of all to entertain and to give space to many other things besides literary criticism. Prévost entirely overestimated Swift's abilities as a poet, as did Voltaire. In fact the two have much more in common and are much nearer in essential ideas of taste than has been generally supposed<sup>1</sup>. The Bathos alone is estimated at its just value and rightly much space is given to it.

It seems that in missing the essential and stressing the unimportant, Prévost showed himself to be fulfilling rather unwillingly the task which his program imposed. He did not understand Swift, nor did he admire him very deeply, but it was necessary to talk of Swift to the French public and as favorably as possible. The result we have seen. It is significant that he well judged Pope, so characteristically French in the main, and went far astray with Swift, more essentially English.

## CHAPTER XV

### PRÉVOST AND GEORGE LILLO

George Lillo's *London Merchant* was a great popular success. It was first played at the Drury Lane theater in the summer of 1731<sup>2</sup> and continued to be given to large houses for several

1. V. Schröder ("L'abbé Prévost journaliste," *Revue du dix-huitième siècle*, 1914, p. 136) comes nearest the truth, but still does not stress the point sufficiently nor develop it at all in detail.

2. First given June 22, 1731. The Abbé Raynal states: "L'abbé Prévost qui s'est trouvé à Londres lorsqu'on a représenté *Le Marchand de Londres*, ou l'histoire de George Barnwell, par Georges Lillo, pour la première fois, m'a dit qu'il n'avait vu de spectacle si frappant que celui-là." Cited by HARRISSE, *L'Abbé Prévost*, p. 146.

If, as the Abbé Raynal states, it was really the first performance, and not one of the later ones in 1733, that Prévost saw, then it is necessary to accept the hypothesis that Prévost, who was back in Holland in the fall of 1730, made a short trip to England in the summer of 1731. This hypothesis is not considered probable by HARRISSE in the *Vie monastique*, p. 48, note 1. It is quite possible, however.



years. Abroad it was even more popular. Prévost gives exact details of its great success. He shows that he has seen it performed and has been strongly impressed.

"Une tragédie qui a été représentée trente-huit fois consécutives sur le théâtre de Drurylane, avec des applaudissemens soutenus, et un nombre de spectateurs presque toujours égal; qui a eu le même succès sur tous les théâtres où elle a paru; dont il s'est débité plusieurs milliers d'exemplaires imprimés, et qu'on ne lit pas avec moins d'ardeur et de plaisir qu'on ne l'a vu représenter; une tragédie qui s'est attiré tant de marques d'approbation et d'estime, doit faire naître à ceux qui en entendront parler, l'une ou l'autre de ces deux pensées: ou qu'elle est un de ces chefs-d'œuvre dont la parfaite beauté se fait sentir à tout le monde; ou qu'elle est si conforme au goût particulier de la nation dont elle fait ainsi les délices, qu'elle peut servir de règle certaine pour juger du goût présent de cette nation pour les spectacles.

"Je veux laisser à mes lecteurs le plaisir de décider eux-mêmes sous lequel de ces deux titres *Georges Barnwell* a pu ravir tous les suffrages de la nation angloise<sup>1</sup>."

The second of the two hypotheses suggested is the one Prévost considers the true one, but that does not prevent him from enjoying parts of the piece. Note the use of the word *tragedy* in spite of the presence of bourgeois characters. This also implies a certain liberalism. He goes on to summarize the plot<sup>2</sup>, then translates "quelques-unes des plus belles scènes."

"Je ne dois pas oublier," he continues, "que Barnwell reçoit dans sa prison la visite de son maître Thorowgood, celle de son ami Truman, et celle de Marie, son amante. Ces trois entrevues forment trois scènes aussi touchantes que bizarres. Thorowgood lui parle en père, qui a le cœur brisé de tendresse et de douleur; Truman en désespéré, qui voudroit mourir pour l'arracher à la mort et à l'infamie; Marie, en amante éperdue

1. PC., III, 337-38.

2. *Ibid.*, 338-43.

qui n'a plus rien à ménager en perdant un homme qu'elle adore.

" Au reste, il n'y a pas un seul trait dans cette exposition qui ne se passe aux yeux des spectateurs. La séduction de Barnwell dans la maison de Millwood, le vol de l'argent chez Thorowgood, le meurtre de l'oncle, etc. : tout s'exécute sur le théâtre, sans aucun égard pour l'unité de tems et de lieu. On suppose que le meurtre se fait dans un bois à quelque distance de la ville; que la maison de Thorowgood est dans un quartier de Londres éloigné de celui de Millwood; la prison dans un autre, etc. Enfin, l'imagination des Anglois est si favorable à cette pièce, qu'elle supplée à tous les défauts de justesse et de vraisemblance<sup>1</sup>. "

Prévost translates Act I, scene 3, but not the scene which contains Barnwell's seduction, for, though he finds it " d'un tour tout à fait ingénieux et agréable, " it is contrary to " la bienséance françoise, " which, " plus rigoureuse que celle d'Angleterre, ne me permet pas de la traduire. Celle qui représente les agitations et les remords de Barnwell, lorsqu'étant de retour au logis, après avoir perdu son innocence, il essuye les tendres reproches de son ami Truman, et de toute la famille de son maître, à qui son absence avoit causé beaucoup d'inquiétude pendant toute la nuit, est d'une beauté singulière<sup>2</sup>. " In Act III, scenes 3 and 4 are translated. At the end of the fourth scene, after the murder of his uncle, " Barnwell jette ici son masque, et pénétré des dernières paroles de son oncle, il se précipite sur son corps qu'il embrasse en lui adressant les choses les plus tendres, et j'ose dire en même temps les plus terribles; car c'est le caractère particulier des Anglois de sçavoir joindre merveilleusement ces deux sortes de sentimens (a).

" (a) C'est la seule des idées d'Aristote qu'ils adoptent et qu'ils suivent. Ils sçavent même unir quelquefois l'agréable et le terrible :

1. PC., III, 343-44.

2. *Ibid.*, 350-51.



Témoin le bel endroit du Cato qui finit ainsi : " Eternity, thou pleasing dreadful thought <sup>1</sup>. "

This lingering trace of Aristotle shows that Prévost's classical training persists, though he does not indicate his personal attitude toward the authority invoked. It is to be noted that the scenes are " touchantes, " a characteristic which we are not surprised to find emphasized by one of the first popularizers of tears in France. Lillo is a forerunner of Richardson, both in his sentimentality and in his moralizing tendency, and Prévost is the translator of Richardson. The violation of the unity of place is mentioned, but — significantly — not objected to. Prévost finds, however, that there are shortcomings in the matter of " vraisemblance. " One of the scenes is " d'une beauté singulière. " The union of the " tendre " and the " terrible " is another trait that has impressed the French author. The vigor, the sentimentality, the rapidity of physical action have all struck Prévost forcibly. He does not seem to find it objectionable that there is a good deal of the melodramatic in it all. Why should he when his own novels are filled with the same note ?

In another passage we see the Prévost whose novels were described by Rousseau as " d'un sombre coloris " and who grew fond of multiplying the number of corpses. English influence did not create this taste <sup>2</sup>, but it did intensify it. In this connection it is strange that Prévost makes no mention of such a characteristic in Shakespear, except apparently to condemn it. It is with real pleasure, however, that he brings Barnwell back on the scene. " Je vais ramener sur la scène le parricide Barnwell, et causer de l'effroi à mes lecteurs par la barbarie monstrueuse de Millwood. C'est la singularité de cette scène plutôt que sa beauté qui me porte à la traduire <sup>3</sup>. "

1. PC., III, 356. Cf. *supra*, Chapter viii.

2. The first four volumes of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* are the proof.

3. PC., IV, 48.

Of Act IV he translates scenes 2 and 3. Of the latter scene he says: " Dans un païs où l'on peut dire qu'on est acoutumé aux spectacles tragiques, et où les plus touchans ne sont pas toujours réservés pour le théâtre, on auroit peine à se figurer jusqu'à quel point le public a été frappé de cette scène. L'étonnement et l'horreur étoient visibles à chaque représentation sur le visage des spectateurs. C'étoit un silence si profond et si lugubre, que pour s'en former l'idée il faudroit éprouver quelque chose du sentiment qui le causoit. L'art d'un comédien habile aide beaucoup sans doute à ces impressions extraordinaires, dont il n'y a point de spectateur qui puisse se défendre... Mais je crois que ce qui n'y contribue guères moins, est la suite de l'action dans une pièce heureusement conduite <sup>1</sup>. "

The personal reminiscences of the emotion visible on the faces of the audience are an interesting document in connection with the success of a piece to which, as Hettner relates, the merchants of the city used to send their apprentices to learn the tragic penalties of dishonesty, and which is said in one instance at least actually to have brought about the reform of one of these young employees who had misappropriated funds entrusted to him <sup>2</sup>. Prévost himself this time goes far with the crowd and shares much of their impression. His attitude toward Lillo shows clearly a Prévost sentimental and " sensible, " the same who is familiar to us from his novels. Nothing could be more noticeable than the difference between this criticism, which is personal and concrete, attaching itself definitely to particular scenes, and the vague generalities he uses about Shakespear. That contrast is not the least valuable and significant characteristic of his treatment of the London Merchant.

Lillo, it will be remembered, repopularized in England the " tragédie bourgeoise " which had been temporarily supplanted by French heroic tragedy. Diderot was strongly influenced by the London Merchant and was impelled to start

1. PC., IV, 23-24.

2. Hettner, Vol. I, p. 467.



in France the movement to bring tragedy down from its lofty pedestal to the commonplace realities of every-day life. So it is of no slight importance that as early as 1734 Prévost made Lillo's play well known to a wide circle of the most cultivated readers in France<sup>1</sup>.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PREVOST AND OTHER ENGLISH AUTHORS

Certain other authors treated by Prévost in less detail are yet important enough to be given some consideration in a study of his criticism, as much perhaps for what he does not say as for what he does. First among these is Butler.

"Hudibras, poème né depuis un siècle, est en effet une des plus singulières productions de l'esprit humain et le chef-d'œuvre d'un genre dans lequel les Anciens ne nous ont point laissé de modèles<sup>2</sup>." Immediately before, Prévost had expressed surprise that two such famous works as *Hudibras* and the *Traité du Profond* had not merely found no translators — that might be explained by the very special difficulty of the task — but had not even been to some degree made known in France by means of short extracts. We have seen that he himself undertook to perform this service for Swift's work, but, whether intentionally or not, he never attempted it for Butler. The impossibility of translating *Hudibras* had already been insisted upon by Voltaire in the *Lettres philosophiques* three years before the above passage. We can be grateful to Prévost for not repeating the old comparisons with the *Satire*

1. Rousseau in his *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) referred to "le Marchand de Londres, pièce admirable, et dont la morale va plus directement au but qu'aucune pièce françoise que je connoisse." *Œuvres*, Hachette, 1862, Vol. I, p. 245, note 1.

2. PC., XIII, 290.

*Ménipée* and *Don Quixote*<sup>1</sup>, even though the setting of *Hudibras* is in fact a reverse imitation of the Spanish work; and we can be still more grateful for his not going the length of Voltaire in extravagant praise. However, Prévost's estimate is too general and too lacking in originality to be of value. It adds nothing to what had gone before.

On Chaucer there is a curious passage. "Geoffroi Chaucer, poète fameux qui florissoit sous son règne [de Henri IV].... Ce Chaucer, auteur de plusieurs poésies qui sont encore en estime, et Jean Gauwer, autre poète du même tems, passent communément pour les premiers réformateurs de la langue angloise, à peu près comme Malherbe a cette gloire parmi nous<sup>2</sup>." Certainly Chaucer would have been amused, Malherbe furious at the comparison. Prévost often uses this comparative method in order to make known the importance of English authors in literary history. The method is useful, but sometimes dangerous, as here. Prévost's excuse for the error is that in his time the English poet was still very little and very poorly known even in his own country. The fact that the necessity of pronouncing his final e's was not yet understood made appreciation of his poetry impossible. For that he still had to wait fifty years. Prévost has evidently not read him and is only repeating a common catchword. But it is something to have mentioned Chaucer; Voltaire in his *Letters* had not done even that much.

Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profanity of the English Stage* (1698) had been translated as early as 1715, but Prévost has nothing important to say of him, which seems somewhat strange, in view of Prévost's own seeming distaste for Restoration drama. However, he probably felt that Collier had gone too far in the other direction and had sinned equally against good taste. He calls him only "un écrivain anglois de quelque réputation" who has

1. Voltaire's comparisons; the second, however, had already been made by Du Bos (1719), *Réflexions*, 6th ed., 1755, p. 146, note.

2. PC., XX, 78-79.



given to the public "divers essais d'histoire et de critique, qui peuvent me fournir la matière d'une feuille intéressante<sup>1</sup>," then goes on to translate some of his remarks on Scotland. Of course we must always take into account the fact that time only may have prevented Prévost from returning to him.

The death of "Jean Dennys" (December 17, 1733) is mentioned, and Prévost adds: "Il est mort dans un âge fort avancé, et aussi couvert de gloire et de blessures que peut l'être un critique qui n'a fait que mordre et recevoir des morsures pendant toute sa vie<sup>2</sup>." "Son humeur caustique et presque insociable" is mentioned. "Dans tout autre pays que l'Angleterre... il auroit été forcé peut-être de renoncer à la société et de se retirer dans un désert, à moins qu'il n'eût sçu prendre assez d'empire sur lui-même pour déguiser ses qualitez insociables ou du moins pour les adoucir. Etant Anglois, il a eu pendant toute sa vie le privilège d'être médisant et satirique, sans que personne ait eu droit de l'obliger au silence<sup>3</sup>." The last sentence at least is interesting as presenting the traditional idea of English freedom and violence of speech coming into conflict with the French ideal of sociability. In the case of Dennis the estimate is just enough, for his old age was embittered by sickness and debt<sup>4</sup> and by the long and violent strife in which he was involved with Pope<sup>5</sup>, Addison, Steele, and Swift<sup>6</sup>. Theobald called him the "modern Furius<sup>7</sup>"; Pope, the "surley Dennis<sup>8</sup>." Thus Prévost reflects directly the contemporary English view as supported by the most influential literary men of the country.

There is one other reference in which "feu Monsieur Dennys" is called "un de leurs plus célèbres critiques," and Prévost

1. PC., IX, 73.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 68.

3. *Ibid.*, III, 68, 70.

4. H. G. Paul, *John Dennis*, p. 61.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

adds : " J'ai vu de lui une brochure particulière, dans laquelle il entreprend de faire ouvrir les yeux de sa patrie, sur la contradiction qui semble y régner perpétuellement entre le goût et les idées <sup>1</sup>. " This is a repetition of the old theme that in literary matters the English have reached the point of knowing the better way, but without practicing it. Prévost welcomes the idea and is fond of insisting upon it.

It is especially unfortunate that Prévost does not characterize in more detail the critical work of Dennis and estimate its value. Such an estimate would have aided materially in forming a correct idea of Prévost's own critical attitude. It is possible that he found Dennis too much of a " strait-rule " critic<sup>2</sup> for his taste.

To Gay is accorded a casual note : " M. Gay, dont tout le mérite est d'avoir composé l'*Opéra des Gueux*, qui n'est qu'une turlupinade, assez ingénieuse à la vérité, mais pleine de traits bas et obscènes <sup>3</sup>. "

The Beggar's Opera was first played on the twenty-ninth of January, 1728. Its success was very great, comparable to that of the London Merchant. In the same winter it was repeated sixty-two times, so that it has been called the first popular success of the modern English stage<sup>4</sup>. Its literary value is small, and here Prévost is keensighted enough not to be blinded by the furor it was causing at the very time he first entered England ; its musical significance he could hardly be expected to perceive at that time<sup>5</sup>. The chief importance of the citation is as evidence that Prévost is once more " non-anglomane, " and that he forms judgments contrary to the

1. PC., XI, 120.

2. Saintsbury, *Hist. of Crit.*, Vol. II, pp. 432-37.

3. PC., IV, 253-54, note (a).

4. *Cambridge Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 182-83 ; where, however, the date of the first representation is incorrectly put after 1736, and then stated correctly five lines below.

5. Hettner, *Literaturgeschichte*, Vol. I, pp. 245-46. " Diese musikalische Bedeutung ist die bleibende. Durch die Wiedererweckung des alten Volksliedes ist die Bettleroper in höchsten Sinn epochemachend geworden. "



current of popular enthusiasm in England. Indeed, we have already seen that there is a great deal of the French attitude which he has by no means thrown over. The objection to the "traits bas et obscènes" is characteristic.

Ben Jonson is not estimated by Prévost himself, but an English judgment is given, an unfavorable one. This is in itself significant, since he is at no pains to correct it, as he often does when he quotes criticism not his own. "Si l'on demande après cela ce que les Anglois pensent de Ben Johnson; voici leur jugement dans les termes d'un de leurs plus célèbres critiques :

" Il étoit fort versé dans les lettres, et c'est l'avantage qu'il a sur Shakespear. Mais ce que celui-ci avoit reçu de la nature, est plus qu'une balance égale pour ce que l'autre avoit puisé dans ses livres. Si Shakespear n'avoit pas lu les Anciens, il s'ensuit qu'il n'a rien pris d'eux. Ben Johnson au contraire n'a pas fait difficulté de les piller ouvertement, et ne l'a pas toujours fait à leur avantage ni au sien; car si Auguste et Virgile étoient tels en effet qu'il les a représentés dans la scène de son *Poetaster*, l'un fut le plus bizarre empereur, et l'autre le plus ridicule poète qu'il y ait jamais <sup>1</sup>. "

This criticism is translated from Rowe<sup>2</sup>, the source of Prévost's information on Shakespear.

Saint-Evremond, one remembers, had put Molière and Ben Jonson on an equal plane. " Notre Molière à qui les Anglois ont inspiré le bon esprit de la comédie, égale leur Ben Johnson à bien représenter les diverses humeurs et les différentes manières des hommes; l'un et l'autre conservant dans leurs peintures un juste rapport avec le génie de leur nation. Je croirois qu'ils ont été plus loin que les Anciens en ce point-là <sup>3</sup>. "

Muralt observed that " l'Angleterre, aussi bien que la France, a eu son plus haut période pour la comédie. Ben Johnson qui

1. PC., XIV, 46-47.

2. Rowe, *Essay on the Life of Shakespear*, pp. xiii-xv.

3. *Œuvres mêlées*, 1709, Vol. II, pp. 212-13.

vivoit au commencement de ce siècle est le poète qui l'a portée le plus loin," but: "Je dirois que Ben Johnson, quoique véritablement grand poète, à certains égards, est inférieur à Molière en beaucoup de choses"; however, in conclusion: "Après tout il faut avouer que Ben Johnson est un poète judicieux, admirable à distinguer et à soutenir les caractères qu'il entreprend, et dont les bonnes pièces sont excellentes dans leur espèce<sup>1</sup>." Muralt prefers him to Shakespear. Prévost evidently knows better than that at any rate.

The English *Observations sur Muralt* admitted that Jonson had faults. He knew nothing of "galanterie," but this was due to the taste of the time and the fact that there were no women acting until the time of Charles II. However, says the author, we esteem him, for he is worthy of esteem and has appeared so to Saint-Evremond. "Personne n'a plus approfondi la nature humaine et n'a plus épuisé tous les caractères qu'il a introduits sur la scène<sup>2</sup>."

As for Prévost, he is quite probably speaking of Jonson from hearsay, or at any rate without much personal interest. The exaggeration of type in Jonson might very well have repelled him, but on the whole it seems more probable that he did not know him at first hand. His information about the Elizabethan period in general is very meager. We have seen already how little evidence he gives of knowing more even of Shakespear than he could learn from Rowe and Gildon. How much less then of other authors of the period, even though, like Jonson, of classical tendencies!

1. Muralt, 2nd ed., 1727, pp. 22-23.

2. *Observations* bound in the same volume with Muralt, p. 330.



## CHAPTER XVII

## PRÉVOST'S SOURCES AND HIS INFLUENCE

At the Jesuit college of Hesdin, at Louis-le-Grand, and at La Flèche, the Abbé Prévost received an education which developed in him for all his life a taste for study and a keen perception of literary beauty<sup>1</sup>. His early studies and his later activities as a member of the Benedictines were all calculated to familiarize him especially with the Latin classics, and he did not react against this training. On the contrary, we find him referring in his works to Virgil and citing frequently Horace. He knew Italian also and referred occasionally in the *Pour et Contre* to Tasso, Guarini, and others. There was nothing then in his education calculated to develop one of the popularizers of English literature in France, or the champion of Shakespear and the forerunner of Romanticism which some — and not entirely without justice — have been pleased to see in him<sup>2</sup>.

His attitude toward the Ancient and Modern controversy is not difficult to determine. We have spoken of his love for the classics. The statement is supported by Prévost himself, when he mentions "le plaisir que je prens toujours à ce qui rapproche de moi la *bonne* antiquité<sup>3</sup>." "Il me paroît surprenant," he says in another passage, "que de tant de poètes modernes qui se sont fait une réputation distinguée dans les différentes parties de l'Europe, il n'y en ait presque pas un dont les opuscules aient été traduits dans une autre langue.

1. V. Schröder, *l'Abbé Prévost*, pp. 4-5, and note.

2. Benjamin M. Woodbridge, *Romantic Tendencies in the Novels of the Abbé Prévost*, PMLA., Vol. XXVI (1911), has pointed out Romantic traits in the novels. I do not take issue with this view so far as his literary practice in the novels is concerned, but do not find that it has left traces in his literary criticism.

3. PC., XIX, 231.

On n'est pas si indifférent pour toutes les pièces de cette nature qui nous restent d'Athènes et de Rome. N'est-ce pas encore une preuve tacite de la supériorité des Anciens<sup>1</sup>?" Prévost here takes no account of other possible reasons than the one he wishes to deduce, but the passage is only the more significant because of its inaccurate reasoning. Yet we must not too quickly nor too completely draw him over to the side of the Ancients. We have already seen him, in connection with Dryden's *All for Love*, close to the position of Fontenelle<sup>2</sup>. In fact Prévost in the *Pour et Contre* causes his "Avocat"<sup>3</sup> to say: "On croiroit après cette remarque que je panche du côté des Anciens. Non, j'entre dans ce tempérament raisonnable qui a rendu M. Wotton un de nos plus judicieux écrivains. . . . Je ne trouve rien de si judicieux et de si modéré que les termes ausquels M. Wotton a réduit toute la question. 1. Si dans les choses où l'on suppose que les Anciens sont parvenus à la perfection, cela vient de ce qu'ils ont eu plus de génie que ceux qui les ont suivis, ou de ce qu'ils sont nez les premiers. 2. S'il y a quelques arts ou quelques sciences que les Anciens ayent exercez ou sçu plus parfaitement que les Modernes, quoique ceux-ci ayent fait leur possible pour les égaler. 3. S'il n'y a point quelques autres arts ou quelques autres sciences dans lesquels les Modernes ayent surpassé les Anciens, quoique les uns et les autres ayent fait tous leurs efforts pour y réussir<sup>4</sup>. " It is probably significant of influence on Prévost that the Abbé Du Bos had cited Wotton to the same effect fifteen years before. "M. Wotton, en mettant le sçavoir des Modernes au-dessus de celui des Anciens dans la plupart des arts et des sciences, tombe d'accord néanmoins que dans la poésie et dans l'éloquence les Anciens ont surpassé les Modernes de bien loin<sup>5</sup>. " The question of influence here

1. PC., XVI, 60.

2. See *supra*, p. 76 and note 4.

3. The "avocat" is the mouthpiece for the French attitude, as is the "ministre" for the English.

4. PC., V, 82, 84-85.

5. Du Bos, I, p. 151.



is made more doubtful by the fact that Prévost's passage is put in the mouth of the "avocat" and not stated to be his own opinion. In another passage, however, he speaks in his own person. "Les François, après avoir paru balancer longtems entre les Anciens et les Modernes, ont pris sans doute le seul parti raisonnable, lorsque renonçant à toutes les préventions qui peuvent tourner au désavantage des uns et des autres, ils se sont accordez à estimer et à suivre tout ce qui leur paroît bon, dans quelque tems et dans quelque lieu qu'il ait pris naissance. Ainsi leur goût portant moins sur les tems que sur les choses, ils jouissent sans exception de tout ce que les arts et les sciences ont produit d'estimable dans tous les siècles ; et par une disposition si raisonnable et si désintéressée, l'on peut dire dans un autre sens que M. de La Motte, qu'ils sont

Contemporains de tous les hommes,  
Et citoyens de tous les lieux <sup>1</sup>.

As in the case of Prévost's treatment of the rules<sup>2</sup>, it is impossible to praise too highly the balance and general soundness of judgment shown in this passage. Doubtless, in spite of his polite and tactful statement, his countrymen had not in general advanced so far ; it is his own attitude that he is really expressing, not theirs. It would be well for Prévost if we could leave this as the final statement of his views. Unfortunately he took up the question again, less happily. "Tous les partisans du bon goût. . . . s'accorderont aussi avec M. de Merville dans l'endroit où il ajoute, que "la dispute sur le  
"mérite des Anciens, qui du tems de Perrault pouvoit passer  
"pour un point de droit, est présentement un point de fait  
"décidé par l'expérience. Auroit-on la hardiesse de nier que  
"ceux d'entre nos écrivains qui ont étudié et imité les  
"Anciens, soient nos plus grands hommes, et qu'ils ayent  
"fait des chefs-d'œuvre ; tandis que ceux qui les ont méprisez,

1. PC., VI, 292-93.

2. *Supra*, pp. 92 ff.

“ et qui ont évité toute ressemblance avec eux sont à peine connus, ou du moins n'ont rien fait d'estimable ? ”

“ Cette manière de rendre justice aux Anciens est aussi modérée qu'ingénieuse ; car sans employer le terme odieux de préférence, qui est capable en effet de révolter un peu les Modernes, les degrés et les rangs se trouvent fort bien assignez. Il est constant que les Anciens ont découvert les bonnes règles et saisi le vrai goût pour tous les ouvrages d'esprit. Qu'on dise, si l'on veut, que leur avantage est d'avoir été les premiers ; mais comme les principes du bon goût sont aussi simples et aussi invariables que ceux de la vérité, il faut nécessairement marcher sur leurs traces pour arriver à la perfection dont ils nous ont tracé des modèles. Ce qui n'empêche point qu'on ne puisse s'élever aussi haut qu'eux, car pourquoi diroit-on que le fond de la nature est altéré dans leurs descendants ? Mais celui qui se proposeroit de les égaler, doit penser d'abord à les imiter ; ou s'il arrivoit, par une heureuse réunion d'efforts et de talents, qu'on produisît quelque chose de vraiment estimable sans les avoir consultez, on seroit tout surpris de s'apercevoir à la fin que ce qu'on auroit fait de meilleur ressembleroit à ce qui nous vient d'eux et que sans avoir su par quelle voye ils ont marché on n'auroit réussi qu'autant que le hazard ou la force de la nature en auroit fait approcher<sup>1</sup>. ” Certainly we are very far here from the vision of a Prévost speaking “ without respect for the Ancients and their rules<sup>2</sup>. ” There is much good sense in the passage, but the best is Merville's and not Prévost's. It is quite surprising to find the latter, so often inspired by the doctrine of relativity, asserting that “ les principes du bon goût sont aussi simples et aussi invariables que ceux de la vérité<sup>3</sup>, ” and that one must follow the Ancients “ pour arriver à la perfection dont ils nous ont tracé des modèles. ” Though stated with moderation, the doctrine but slightly masks a very narrow and absolute dogmatism whose chief merit is

1. PC., IX, 348-49.

2. Jusserand, p. 173.

3. Yes, if all truth were perfectly known.



that it does not at any rate deny to the Moderns the possibility of equaling their great predecessors, but which is very much marred by prescribing that they must do it by following the same methods. Prévost's classical training has evidently dominated him more than any other passage of his would permit us to suppose. Explanation of the lack of harmony between this and his previous utterances on the same question lies probably simply in those contradictions which almost always appear at different times in the writing of any one whose special care has not been to try to put his varying moods and opinions in harmony. Prévost wrote always very rapidly; journalistic work like the *Pour et Contre* was probably composed with particular haste; he could never imagine that it would ever be closely scrutinized and the effort made to harmonize and evaluate his different opinions; so that it is not strange that we should find such a passage as the one just cited. Probably it does express his real attitude, but more absolutely than he actually intended. We can hardly doubt that he preferred in his heart the Ancients and those who had imitated them most successfully. Were not his three favorites Racine, La Bruyère, and Fénelon<sup>1</sup>? But his practice makes it evident that he was open-minded in his attitude and, as he himself says, ready to esteem and follow all that appears good, "dans quelque tems et dans quelque lieu qu'il ait pris naissance." Only it is clear that his theoretical open-mindedness was limited by his education and preferences so that he would still use the Ancients as his measuring staff. It is for this reason that he is unable really to appreciate Shakespear and Swift, but is successful in dealing with the more classical Dryden, Steele, Addison, and Pope.

In his attitude Prévost is substantially in accord with Du Bos, who also was influenced by Wotton. Du Bos was certainly known to Prévost, even though not mentioned by him<sup>2</sup>,

1. MHQ., I, 170.

2. Du Bos was mentioned favorably by Desfontaines during his editorship of Volume II of the *Pour et Contre*.

and his general spirit was fitted to please our Abbé. It is probable, however, that there is here no question of direct influence. At the most Du Bos could hardly have done more than strengthen Prévost in the opinion which his whole education and cast of mind would have tended in any case almost inevitably to form. Prévost surely derives much more from the classical authors whom he read in his youth at Hesdin and at Louis-le-Grand, and from the Racine, the La Bruyère, and the Fénelon whom he later loved so well.

In placing men of this period properly among the "familles d'esprits," one other much discussed question is very helpful, that of rhyme. "La rime", says Prévost, "n'est pas une perfection dans la poésie, . . . elle doit même être regardée comme un défaut<sup>1</sup>." "On conviendra volontiers qu'elle est la poésie du vulgaire, c'est-à-dire de tous ceux qui ne sont point capables de sentir d'autre différence entre la prose et les vers<sup>2</sup>." "N'est-il pas certain qu'elle est le fruit de la corruption du goût dans des siècles d'ignorance et de barbarie<sup>3</sup>?" "La même raison qui a fait que les Grecs et les Romains ont négligé la rime dans les bons siècles de leur langue, fait que les Anglois et les Italiens la rejettent aujourd'hui, parce que leur langue est assez parfaite pour se passer de ce secours. Ils ne sont pas les inventeurs d'une nouvelle poésie, mais les restituteurs de la bonne. Quant au plaisir qu'ils y prennent, l'auteur n'en doit pas douter, puisque ceux de leurs poètes dont ils font le plus de cas, ont été les premiers qui ont secoué le joug de la rime<sup>4</sup>." Fénelon, Prévost's ancestor in certain respects, had opposed rhyme, though less completely. "Notre versification perd plus, si je ne me trompe, qu'elle ne gagne par les rimes. . . Je n'ai garde néanmoins de vouloir abolir les rimes; sans elles, notre poésie tomberait<sup>5</sup>."

1. PC., VI, 75.

2. *Ibid.*, X, 250.

3. *Ibid.*, X, 249. Cf. XII, 253.

4. *Ibid.*, X, 283. Cf. V, 81; X, 243-64, 278-88; XX, 13.

5. Fénelon, *Lettre à l'Académie*, Chap. V, Cahen ed., 1908, p. 55 and p. 58.



La Motte, the enemy of poetry in general, opposed rhyme in particular on the ground that it distorted thought. At least his position was more reasonable than that of Fontenelle, who saw in rhyme only the merit of the "difficulté vaincue." If that were indeed all, then certainly it should be abolished. Du Bos likewise had attacked rhyme. It is difficult not to see in the following passage the origin of at least one of Prévost's contentions: "La rime, ainsi que les fiefs et les duels, doit donc son origine à la barbarie de nos ancêtres<sup>1</sup>. " "Enfin il faut rimer," says Du Bos, but he accepts it only as a regrettable, though unavoidable, sign of the inferiority of the French language in comparison with Greek and Latin. "Peut-on d'ailleurs ne point regarder le travail bizarre de rimer comme la plus basse fonction de la mécanique de la poésie<sup>2</sup>?" Prévost's position is different from that of Du Bos only in that he carries the argument to its logical conclusion and, along with La Motte, refuses to accept the evil as inevitable. His patriotism refuses to acknowledge that French is inferior as a poetic medium to Greek or Latin, Italian or English. The charm of Italian "versi sciolti" and the majesty of Milton's blank verse<sup>3</sup> have aroused his admiration. In thinking that, in order to equal them, all which eighteenth-century French poetry needed to do was to discard rhyme, Prévost was obviously wrong. To Voltaire, perhaps not without reason, rhyme seemed more necessary for French than for other languages whose accentual character and greater liberty of syntax made possible more varied metrical combinations. Even in his error, Prévost showed an appreciation of the fact that French poetry needed to be rejuvenated; his poetic perceptions were less blunted than were those of La Motte, and of the greater Montesquieu and Buffon; he was wrong only in his choice of the method<sup>4</sup>. From time to time under the influence of some

1. Du Bos, I, p. 363.

2. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 336, 357-58. Cf. I, p. 299.

3. Cf. *supra*, Chap. x.

4. In PC., XII, 21-22, we find this citation: "La poésie n'a peut-être

particularly vigorous gust of foreign poetry he felt vaguely conscious of something in which the elegant versifiers of his own country were lacking, and sought a remedy, finding it, as he thought, in the criticisms of Fénelon, La Motte, and Du Bos.

Among the influences which produced Prévost's liberalism, Montaigne<sup>1</sup>, whom he often cites, is important. Fénelon also, for whom Prévost had an especial fondness and with whom he had many characteristics in common<sup>2</sup>, had welcomed the idea of relativity. "Chaque nation a ses mœurs, très différentes de celles des peuples voisins<sup>3</sup>." Bayle, constantly attacking dogmatism of whatever form, appealed strongly to Prévost, who cites him as frequently as he does Montaigne. The Abbé was much impressed by Bayle's open-minded spirit of inquiry and by the power of his logic. "Il y a peu d'esprits aussi nets, aussi justes, et aussi pénétrants que le sien<sup>4</sup>." Fontenelle he admires also, because of his "élégance" particularly<sup>5</sup>, but also because of his knowledge of the sciences<sup>6</sup>. It is hardly to be doubted that Fontenelle's attacks on tradition had their effect on Prévost and helped to free him in part from the weight of the past. The whole quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns tended of course in that direction. In fact the one great result of that controversy was the releasing of the spirit of progress and of self-reliance. Prévost, as we have seen, was

jamais été cultivée avec tant de succès; car dans quel rang la postérité ne mettra-t-elle pas le siècle des Rousseaux, des Voltaire, et de tant d'autres poètes qui se succèdent sans interruption? ... Comment craindre la décadence du savoir et du goût dans un siècle où ils s'établissent tous les jours sur de si bons fondemens? "The passage is not given as Prévost's own opinion but as part of a letter from an "inconnu" (p. 15) who may or may not be a mask for the Abbé himself. It is probable that Prévost himself partly sympathized with this attitude but would have hesitated to accept it in so extreme a form.

1. Cf. *supra*, p. 36.

2. Cf. *supra*, p. 39.

3. *Lettre à l'Académie*, Chap. VIII, p. 120.

4. PC., III, 184.

5. *Ibid.*, IX, 67.

6. *Ibid.*, V, 90.



much farther from being a Modern than has been thought, but the very fact that he consciously embraced the doctrine that the French have something to learn from English as well as from classic taste shows that the liberalizing spirit has had its effect. He was indeed actually preparing his countrymen to substitute imitation of the English for imitation of the Ancients. It was no small innovation. We need not be surprised that he did not burn his bridges behind him.

Liberalism in regard to the rules was not by any means entirely an affair of the eighteenth century. Prévost's own classic Racine had taken issue with the rules in these terms: "Je les conjure d'avoir assez bonne opinion d'eux-mêmes pour ne pas croire qu'une pièce qui les touche, et qui leur donne du plaisir, puisse être absolument contre les règles. La principale règle est de plaire et de toucher. Toutes les autres ne sont faites que pour parvenir à cette première <sup>1</sup>." So, as was to be expected, Molière: "Car enfin, si les pièces qui sont selon les règles ne plaisent pas et que celles qui plaisent ne soient pas selon les règles, il faudroit de nécessité que les règles eussent été mal faites <sup>2</sup>." La Bruyère, whom Prévost was fond of reading, exclaims: "Quelle prodigieuse distance entre un bel ouvrage et un ouvrage parfait et régulier! Je ne sais s'il s'en est encore trouvé de ce dernier genre. Il est peut-être moins difficile aux rares génies de rencontrer le grand et le sublime, que d'éviter toute sorte de fautes <sup>3</sup>." La Bruyère has this other passage worthy of Rousseau <sup>4</sup>: "Quand une lecture vous élève l'esprit, et qu'elle vous inspire des sentiments nobles et courageux, ne cherchez pas une autre règle pour juger de l'ouvrage; il est bon, et fait de main d'ouvrier <sup>5</sup>." Thus in the seventeenth century by the avowed partizans of the Ancients; in the eighteenth of course there are real attacks and

1. Racine, *Préface de Bérénice*, *Œuvres*, II, p. 378.

2. Molière, *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*, sc. 6; Vol. III, pp. 358-59.

3. La Bruyère, *des Ouvrages de l'esprit*, par. 30.

4. Rousseau, *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Part 2, Letter XVIII, the Pope-Crouzas controversy.

5. La Bruyère, *op. cit.*, par. 34.

they are more definite and violent. It is no longer only the spirit of genius occasionally calling the rules in question when criticism tends to hamper too much the practice of his art, it is an attack on the whole principle of literary law-giving in general. La Motte in 1730 lances this reply to Voltaire's championship of the rules: "Vous vous récriez d'abord qu'un peuple sensé ne saurait ne pas être ami des règles. Oui, monsieur, si les règles voulaient dire la raison; mais comme elles ne signifient là que des institutions arbitraires, on peut fort bien avoir le sens commun sans les exiger. Ma pensée ne va donc en cet endroit qu'à prouver que l'unité seule d'un grand intérêt pourrait plaire par elle-même, au lieu que les trois unités sèchement observées pourraient encore glacer les spectateurs<sup>1</sup>." In the same year La Motte attacked the lack of action in the French theater and advised a *judicious* imitation of the English in this respect<sup>2</sup>. The reducing of the unities to that of action alone is exactly what Prévost himself does in his treatment of Steele<sup>3</sup>. It is one of the best parts of his criticism, but La Motte has preceded him. Still earlier Saint-Evremond had observed in regard to the rules: "Les Anglois sont persuadés que les libertés qu'on se donne pour mieux plaire doivent être préférées à des règles exactes, dont un auteur stérile et languissant se fait un art d'ennuyer. Il faut aimer la règle pour éviter la confusion; il faut aimer le bon sens qui modère l'ardeur d'une imagination allumée; mais il faut ôter à la règle toute contrainte qui gêne, et bannir une raison scrupuleuse, qui par un trop grand attachement à la justesse, ne laisse rien de libre et de naturel<sup>4</sup>." Finally, it can hardly be doubted that Du Bos, whose influence on his century was so great, exerted much influence upon Prévost also. Du Bos preached constantly criticism of "sentiment" instead

1. La Motte, *Suite des Réflexions sur la tragédie, où l'on répond à M. de Voltaire*, p. 60.

2. La Motte, *Discours à l'occasion de la tragédie de Romulus*, p. 502.

3. *Supra*, pp. 93-97.

4. Saint-Evremond, *Œuvres mêlées*, II, p. 212.



of criticism by rule. He acknowledges the same criterion as La Fontaine, Racine, Molière, and La Bruyère when he says that the work of art must please and touch the emotions, and that only by its effect may it be judged. He goes farther than they, however, in his perception that criticism must be historical and relative. We have seen that Prévost is usually conscious that to judge a foreign literature one must be thoroughly familiar with the customs, institutions, and character of the people among whom it has been produced. Only rarely does he seem to depart from this principle of relativity.

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the formation of Prévost's general attitude of conservative liberalism may in the main be traced to authors of his own country, such of it, that is, as is not due to his eventful life which brought him early into touch with different social, political, and literary *milieux*. When he went to England, he was already thirty-one years old; his general point of view must have been almost entirely formed before he came into contact with English literature. We cannot share the viewpoint of Mr. Bury, who in an enthusiastic essay attributes much of Prévost's formation to De Foe and to the English writers of the age of Elizabeth and of James. "To what sources," exclaims Mr. Bury, "had Prévost gone for inspiration and tragic power; if not to the English sixteenth century? And he only handed down to our modern literature what he had received from the country of Webster, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Heywood; for in England self-analysis dates far back<sup>1</sup>." Of those mentioned, however, the only one whom Prévost gives indication of knowing even by name is Ben Jonson and him, as we have seen, he judges entirely after Rowe without adding a single personal comment. Prévost had used the autobiographical manner in the novel before going to England and, even though he may have read De Foe as soon as it was translated into French, he did not need to seek the method there; it was not new to the country

1. F. B. Bury, *The Abbé Prévost in England*, p. 33.

of Courtilz de Sandras and Lesage. As for the "science du milieu", it is difficult to find it in Prévost's novels, except in the most vague and undeveloped form. Often his scenes are laid in countries of which he knew little or nothing.

It seems that he really came little in contact with English literature anterior to Dryden. Shakespear he knew somewhat; he probably had read and seen acted many of his plays, but we have seen that he brought back to his countrymen a minimum of personal impressions regarding the great playwright. Dryden came closer to him, and Milton, but they both yield before Steele, Addison, and Pope, who were really of one mind with him on most points of literary doctrine. Their influence, however, was directed mainly along the same lines as that of the liberal movement we have already seen appearing about the same time in France; it strengthened, but did not create, the tendencies of Prévost's criticism.

We have already noted more direct sources for his literary judgments: the Essays of Rowe and Gildon are all-important and most significant in doing away with nearly the whole of his supposed originality as far as Shakespear is concerned; Addison he cites frequently, as did Du Bos before him and Le Blanc after; Pope naturally is invoked as an authority and Shaftesbury likewise; Toland's Life of Milton is utilized<sup>2</sup>, as is Wotton's Essay on Ancient and Modern Learning<sup>3</sup>. A

1. Bury, *o. c.*, p. 38 and p. 49. Mr. Bury (p. 36) waves the *Pour et Contre* aside with the remark that Prévost "never forgot he was catering for a nation who always had detested earnest praise of another country; he wrote, therefore, more *en dilettante* in this journal than in any of his works, and M. Brunetière could scarcely say that in his periodical Prévost gave himself *tout entier*. . . The *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* contain a page on the English stage that reveals what the author thought, and did not always say, to the Parisian readers of his journal." There is a grain of truth in this attitude, but, it seems to me, only a grain. In any case it needs to be proved. There is no reason to suppose that the *Mémoires* represent Prévost's final opinion any more than the *Pour et Contre*, whereas what evidence we have of the author's preferences tends, as we have seen, to show that concessions in the periodical to public taste are not frequent nor important and that the journal represents substantially Prévost's real attitude toward English literature.

2. The same source had been used by the 1720 edition of Bayle.

3. Cf. *supra*, pp. 118-19.



study of the daily papers and periodicals published in London during the period from 1728 to 1740 might perhaps reveal other borrowings like those from Rowe and Gildon<sup>1</sup>; it is improbable, however, that these would materially change our estimate of Prévost's criticism, the case of the other authors involved being very different from that of Shakespear, who alone of those treated by Prévost presented especial difficulties to one of French training and tastes<sup>2</sup>. It is most unfortunate that important letters and documents concerning the Abbé Prévost, still preserved at Hesdin in 1844, were burned in a moment of pique by one of Prévost's own descendants, Alphonse-Xavier Le Merchier<sup>3</sup>. Editing the *Pour et Contre* nearly seven years in France, Prévost must have kept up constant and voluminous correspondence with friends in England. None of that correspondence has come to light.

So much for the question of sources; that of the influence of Prévost upon his period is more difficult to solve, for the Abbé was not one of those vigorous champions of new causes who leave a markedly individual impress on their time, so that even later ages may pick up the traces. His influence tends either to be obscured by that of Voltaire or to become merged with that of those contemporaries who also were aiding the spread of English ideas. The Abbé Le Blanc referred to Prévost's translation of *All for Love*<sup>4</sup> and criticized a detail regarding Hamlet<sup>5</sup>. Voltaire, as is shown by his correspondence and his evident desire to be well spoken of in the *Pour et Contre*, considered it a magazine of influence. He even gave circulation to some of his articles by having them printed in Prévost's journal. Both Rousseau<sup>6</sup> and Diderot<sup>7</sup>

1. Cf. *supra*, Chap. VII, pp. 67 ff. The files of these newspapers have not been accessible to me.

2. Swift pleased Prévost's contemporaries more than he did the Abbé himself.

3. Harrise, pp. 76-77.

4. *Supra*, p. 73, note 3.

5. *Lettres d'un François*, II, pp. 294-95.

6. *Œuvres*, V, pp. 469, 578.

7. *Œuvres*, VII, p. 313.

praised Prévost's novels very highly; it is quite probable, especially in the case of Diderot, that they were also readers of the *Pour et Contre*. We know that Rousseau later referred to Lillo's play, the *London Merchant*, in terms of the highest praise, and that it was Prévost who introduced this piece to the French public. Diderot in turn was strongly influenced by this same play in the direction of his *bourgeois* drama. Whether their first acquaintance with Lillo came from Prévost or from Clément of Geneva, who in 1748 translated the whole play, is not certain. The latter in any case was familiar with Prévost's previous treatment<sup>1</sup>.

But Prévost's influence must be sought less in particular individuals than in the public at large for whom he wrote. The *Pour et Contre* was read, not only in France, but wherever in Europe the French language and literature were familiar to a cultivated society. M. Lirondelle<sup>2</sup> has noted that it was read in Russia. It is needless to insist upon the rôle of French in the eighteenth century as the one universal language read and spoken from Italy to Sweden. It is not without moment that the great names of English literature and much of their work were thus early treated by the *Pour et Contre* with fairness and moderation. In the case of Shakespear it is especially important that Prévost was not the rabid anglomaniac that he has been thought to be; had he been so, it might well be that the cause of English literature would have been greatly hindered instead of helped, that Europe impregnated with the principles of French taste might have rejected for a longer time still the great master of English drama. As it was, the Abbé Prévost presented the English poet, with insufficient personal enthusiasm it is true, but with fairness and due attention to the more reasonable of the two English attitudes, warning his readers frankly that they would find much that would displease and shock their

1. Jusserand, p. 193, n. 1.

2. *Shakespeare en Russie*, p. 16.



taste, but telling them at the same time that they would find much to repay their reading in this strange new drama that had come out of the north. It cannot be doubted that thus Prévost rendered a very real service both to English and to French literature, a service for which he deserves high credit, even though its extent cannot be precisely measured.

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